大伝説の勇者の伝説

9

落ちこぼれの悪あがき

鏡貴也

TAKAYA KAGAMI

ファンタジア文庫

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「キファ、いくぞ」
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9
落ちこぼれの悲あがき

「闇よ、
有れ」

『
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「……あは」
どんどん、どんどん、
自分の中の『ニンゲン』の部分が
大きくなっていくのを心地好く感じて、
彼女は楽しい気分になる。

Influence Map of Menoris

Anti-Roland Coalition = People's Republic of Sphelliyet

♦ Ferris Eris

Ryner's partner. A girl with unworldly beauty who's a master swordswoman. Her love for dango knows no bounds.

♦ Vois Fiurelle

Manipulating the coalition from the backstage, he was originally a leader of a swindler group.

♦ Kiefer Knolles

Originally a spy from a neighbouring country, she's in love with Ryner.

Demon King Ryner Lute

The king of the Anti-Roland Coalition = People's Republic of Sphelliyet. Was best friends with Sion.

Roland Empire

♦ Lucile Eris

The head of the < sword clan > that has protected Roland's king for generations. Ferris's older brother.

♦ Calne Kaiwal

Sion's ally from the previous Revolution, a Major General in the Roland army. Presently, he's a prisoner in the Remrus Empire.

♦ Milk Callaud

Captain of the "Taboo Breaker Pursuit Squad". Grew up in Roland's Special Institute #307 like Ryner.

Hero King Sion Astal

Putting an end to the tyrannical rule of the corrupt nobles, an illegitimate prince who started a revolution to take the throne. After unifying the southern continent, he now aims to advance into the central continent.

Other Powers

Azure Princess Mercenaries

♦ Pia Varliere

The queen of the Azure Princess Mercenaries, a bearer of a Congenital Magic Abnormality. Ryner's childhood friend.

Cursed Eyes Bearers

♦ Ene

"Torch Curse" bearer. The one who guides Tiir and the Cursed Eye bearers.

♦ Tiir Rumibul

As one who possess an "Iino Doue"that absorbs magic, now after Lieral's life.

Remrus Empire

♦ Remrus Remuld Aarqued

A mysterious man who rules over the Remrus Empire as a god's child. At war with Roland.

Unknown Affiliation

♦ Lieral Lieutolu

As Ryner's father, the Roland noble Duke Lieutolu. A magic scholar of the highest level.

Gastark Empire

♦ **Reeglewaz Pentest**

The commander of the Gastark Empire's army. Riphal's right-hand man.

♦ **Lir Orla, Kuu Orla, Sui Orla**

As spies from Gastark, the three of them are siblings. Each of them is in possession of "Rhule Fragmei".

Hero King Riphal Edea

Having gained control over the northern continent, the king of the Gastark Empire. He has a large sword that, by offering part of his body as compensation, can unleash large-scale destruction. Glouvil's wielder.

Prologue

The wind blew.

In this wind, his silver-coloured hair swayed.

On top of his horse, Sion Astal gazed in the direction that the wind was blowing.

The wind was mixed with the stench of blood.

His allies' blood.

People were dying.

His allies were dying.

His enemies were dying.

And above the mountain of corpses that continued to increase, he advanced forward.

"....."

It was a battlefield.

As night had yet to fully disappear, it was a battlefield in the early morning.

Someone called for him.

Amidst the thundering roar and light flickering from the multi-coloured magic,

"Your Majesty!"

Someone called for them.

That voice frantically,

"Your Majesty! Don't stay here for any longer. Please fall back!"

It exclaimed that.

However, he didn't respond.

Instead, he stared ahead.

Staring straight ahead, he continued forward on his horse.

Towards the landscape where people continued to die.

Towards the landscape filled and overflowing with life, death, light, and thunder, he advanced.

"....."

Then, from another location, someone was speaking to him.

He didn't see who.

Rather, in his ear,

"... Do you intend to die?"

A voice sounded, to which Sion replied,

"You'll protect me, won't you?"

"Unfortunately, I currently lack the power for that,"

The voice said.

At that, Sion turned towards the source of the voice. However, as he expected, its owner wasn't there.

Lucile Eris wasn't there.

But to that, Sion spoke.

"You still haven't undone Remrus's curse?"

"It's a troublesome thing, it seems."

"Then, do your best on your own."

"With you having come all the way here, it'd be troubling if you died."

"Ha—how unusual. Are you worried about me?"

As Sion said that, Lucile's figure suddenly appeared.

However, it wasn't from behind, where his voice came from, but in

front of Sion.

As if to completely stop Sion from moving forward, he stood in the horse's path.

Glossy golden hair, closed eyes.

An abnormally good-looking appearance.

He gently held out his small hand.

With that, the offensive magic unleashed towards Sion by the Remrus Empire's soldiers was extinguished.

But from that, already, the enemy soldiers were aware what it would mean to immediately approach Sion.

Right now, what was arriving at Sion's location wasn't a large-scale offensive spell.

It was ordinary, short-range magic.

In other words, the enemy soldiers, by destroying Sion's ally soldiers, they were already pushing him directly into their hands, as they drew closer.

Lucile looked around with a troubled expression.

That the Remrus Empire's soldiers were starting to surround him—no, starting to surround Sion, he understood.

As their ally soldiers were being killed by Remrus's soldiers, one by one,

"Your Majesty!"

Someone called.

"We shall hold them back, please esca..."

However, those words didn't continue until the end.

Again, another ally died.

And the soldier that killed that ally now appeared to be forming a spell to fire at Sion—

However, now, that soldier was killed by Lucile.

As he wordlessly swung his hand, the soldier's body was sliced in half and sent dancing through the air.

Looking down at that, Sion spoke.

"What were you talking about? Don't you still have enough power?"

Lucile then looked up at him and replied,

"Right now, if monsters such as the **Goddesses** or Remrus came here, I would be unable to protect you."

"I see."

"Furthermore, this battle has already been won, has it not? You've accomplished enough of your duty to act as a decoy. Appearing at the frontlines like this has pulled away the enemy. You've already ensured enough that the other divisions may move about freely,"

Lucile said.

Correct.

Sion's movements here were according to that sort of plan.

During the time where Sion was at the frontlines, luring away the main forces of the Remrus Empire's army, Claugh and Bayuuz would strike from behind with their forces.

And that plan was easily accomplished.

At any rate, the end soldiers of the enemy's main force, in an attempt to chase after Sion, had gone too far.

Chances were, with the enemy's military warfront having been spread out, their rear was being lightly guarded, and so Claugh and co. could begin their assault.

Of course, in a normal battle, they wouldn't be able to carry out this sort of tactics.

After all, if Sion were to die here, then it would all be over.

However, Sion managed to dispel his subordinates' protest, and so this plan was put into action.

Because Lucile was here.

Because Lucile of the sword clan had followed him here.

But Lucile spoke.

"My power likely hasn't returned yet. Therefore, I would advise that you not overdo it?"

In response to those words,

"....."

Sion said nothing, though.

Instead, he merely gazed in the same direction as before, without a word.

There, it seemed that a gigantic sphere of light was being formed.

It was a large-scale offensive spell from the Remrus Empire's army.

If it were a power that could negate such a spell, Sion no longer had enough soldiers with him for that.

Already, clashing with the Remrus soldiers in what had become a free-for-all, they wouldn't be able to gather enough mages for a large-scale offensive spell.

In other words, that spell would make a direct hit here.

Furthermore, together with their in this fight, the enemy's spell would obliterate them all.

It was only natural.

Sion was here.

The king of their enemy country was here.

If they could kill him here, this war would end.

The enemy was also frantic.

As that large-scale spell came to be, Lucile gazed towards the gigantic sphere of light, and,

"Fall back already, Sion. Protecting you any more than this would

be difficult."

He said in a sincerely exasperated voice.

"....."

However, unsurprisingly, Sion didn't respond.

Because the wind was blowing.

Because, as the light of the large-scale spell spread throughout the nearby sky, the wind was blowing.

That wind was, as expected, tinged with the scent of blood.

The stench of corpses was present.

But mixed in with that, he sensed something else.

He didn't know what.

But there was some sort of uneasy feeling from over there.

No, perhaps one could call it a sense of loss.

Something important?

He felt as if he'd lost something very important to him.

Over where the light was.

Over where the light of the large-scale spell, cutting through the darkness of the night that had yet to turn into day—it felt as if something deeply unpleasant was occurring there.

"....."

Gently, he held up his hand.

Though Remrus's soldiers were gathering around him and preparing to attack, he, without paying them any heed, held up his hand and murmured,

"Sword."

From within the center of his palm, a black light came forth.

That light took on the form of a sword.

Black.

Black.

Blacker than the night, it was a jet-black sword.

Regarding that, Lucile spoke. While killing the people attacking Sion, one by one,

"Exactly what are you doing? In this sort of place, using that power isn't nece..."

However, ignoring him, Sion used that power.

That power was that of **The Fallen Dark Hero** [Asruld Roland], dwelling within his body.

If he were to use that power before obtaining just enough strength to resist it, he would lose his ability to reason as a human.

Control would be handed over to the **Hero** [Monster].

Hence why, as much as possible, he gradually advanced forward without such a power.

However, he used that power.

The sword separating from his hand, it flew towards the light of the large-scale spell.

And as the sword pierced through its target, what it struck disappeared.

From this world.

It was as if that magic and all information regarding it had never existed in this world.

As if it'd never existed, its existence disappeared.

The soldiers were in a state of disturbance.

At any rate, though they should have been in the middle of something, the knowledge of what vanished entirely from their minds. Because of that, the soldiers were thrown into chaos.

But that sort of thing didn't matter to Sion.

After all, what he was looking towards was near where that annoying large-scale spell had been, where something should be happening.

Something was happening there, where the night sky had yet to turn into day.

Staring at that,

"... Lucile,"

He murmured.

At that, while slaughtering the surrounding enemies,

"... I already understand what it is that you wish to say,"

He said.

Somehow, it seemed that Lucile, just now, understood the sense of unease Sion was feeling.

In response, Sion asked,

"... What's going on?"

"Who knows? But, likely... nothing pleasant?"

To those words, Sion looked at Lucile, and then looked up at the sky again.

Furthermore, his sense of unease grew stronger.

No, already, it was inaccurate to simply call it unease.

It was something that caused a sense of coldness and chill throughout his entire body. The air and atmosphere that came into contact with his body trembled and pulsed.

And—

"... Just now, the world changed,"

Sion muttered.

That, he felt clearly.

He felt that something there that, uncertain but sternly holding up the structure of the world, suddenly vanished.

Some sort of structure.

He felt some sort of structure change.

Regarding that, Lucile looked up at the sky.

He looked up at the distant, northern sky.

And again,

"... Fall back, Sion,"

He said.

To which Sion said,

"But—"

"What can you accomplish here?"

"....."

"There's someone beyond us who intend to repaint this world. They've come into contact with something."

"....."

"In that case, we must advance as well. For us, our objective..."

However, Lucile's words ended there.

Because surrounding him, a great deal of humans casting magic stopped.

And simultaneously, they began to retreat.

As if having lost all interest in this battle that they'd come here for, they began to retreat.

Staring at that,

"... Did Claugh defeat the Remrus Empire's main force?"

Sion muttered.

Then,

"Do you truly think so?"

Lucile said.

Of course he didn't. There was obviously something strange about the enemy's current state.

At any rate, the situation wasn't one that would call for an order to withdraw. Furthermore, it was clear that right now, this battle was going in the enemy's favour, so they shouldn't need to retreat.

Despite that, they were beginning to withdraw.

And without missing that opportunity, Sion's subordinates started their counterattack.

Where Sion was,

"Your Majesty, please take this chance to escape!"

His soldiers exclaimed things such as that, and then began launching their attacks at the retreating Remrus soldiers.

On top of that, among Roland soldiers, having amended their stance, the mages organized themselves and began preparing a large-scale offensive spell—**Raguru**.

With countless mages, intertwined with one another, a gigantic magic circle was formed—

"....."

However, even then, the Remrus soldiers didn't defend themselves.

They didn't react to any attack.

Even though they should've had such a capability, they only focused on escaping instead.

They didn't even do something such as prepare a spell to counter **Raguru**.

If **Raguru** were to be activated, then hundreds, thousands of

soldiers would be obliterated, and yet they didn't do anything at all to defend themselves.

Regarding that scene,

"... Just what is the meaning of this?"

Sion said.

Lucile replied,

"Who knows? But surely, it's a trap, you realize?"

"A trap. A trap... is it?"

At that, he looked towards the state of the fleeing Remrus soldiers.

They had no emotion on their faces. Even as they were being killed by the Roland soldiers, they had nothing on their faces.

It was a hollow sort of expression, as if they were in a trance.

It was different from before.

Before, when the Remrus soldiers were trying to kill Sion, they acted the same as any other ordinary human.

But now,

"... They're completely like puppets,"

Sion said, while staring at the Remrus soldiers who didn't even cry out as they were being killed.

And during that moment, he felt the world being repainted.

The air trembled, as the colour of the landscape changed.

Of course, the others didn't notice.

After all, rather than in the world where people dwelled, it was something that occurred in a different dimension.

After all, it was something that occurred in an unusual place that deviated just slightly from the world where people dwelled.

But for certain, Sion felt the structure of the world change.

Then,

"Your Majesty, we've won the battle!"

One of his subordinates exclaimed.

In a complete change from their earlier, grievous state, the soldiers cried out with strong voices.

Turning towards one of them, Sion spoke.

"Don't lower your guard. Investigate why the enemy has suddenly begun retreating."

His subordinate immediately responded.

"It seems that the force that Field Marshal Claugh Klom was leading executed a surprise attack against the Remrus Empire's main forces. Perhaps that was the enemy's reason for..."

He began, but interrupting him, Sion spoke.

Narrowing his eyes at the Remrus soldiers, who were being killed one by one,

"... Don't pursue them. Fall back."

Though his subordinate looked up at him with a surprised expression, Sion ignored him and turned away on his horse.

Though, despite that, the soldiers didn't immediately halt, he, unsurprisingly, paid that no heed and began mobilizing towards the south.

Furthermore, while following him,

"Are you not advancing forward?"

Lucile asked, to which Sion answered,

"... What do you think?"

"I wonder. In any case, it seems that the country of the Remrus Empire isn't being ruled over by a human. Their reasons for taking part in this fight aren't those of a human's, then. Now then, shall you pursue them, or shall you withdraw?"

Lucile said.

And that was an abnormally difficult question.

The actions of the Remrus soldiers were essentially daring them to pursue them.

Simply laid out, they were actions that suggested that there was a trap waiting for them.

That was why this was a troubling situation.

Did he honestly want to pursue them?

Otherwise, suspecting that there was a trap, did he want to withdraw?

He didn't know.

If one were to look only at the battle situation, then chasing after them would obviously be the correct decision.

Sion acted as a decoy, while Claugh launched a surprise attack—it was that sort of situation.

If they took advantage of this opportunity, they could attack the Remrus Empire with one fell swoop.

But,

"I'll fall back. Lucile, you still haven't undone the curse laid on you, have you?"

He said, looking Lucile's way, to which the latter made a slightly thoughtful expression, and,

"Even if you make that choice, it may be Remrus's aim, perhaps? How troubling. Regardless of whether you advance forwards or fall back, there's a problem. Thus, I shall obey you,"

He said, and with that, he vanished.

But then, on top of that, other subordinates came with further information.

"Your Majesty, I have a report from Field Marshal Claugh Klom."

"Tell me."

At that, the subordinate replied,

"As Field Marshal Claugh Klom's force has launched a surprise attack on the Remrus Empire's main forces, the enemy has surrendered. Furthermore, an envoy from the Remrus Empire has come and apparently proposed that they come under Roland custody. How shall we respond?"

After he said such things,

"....."

Sion frowned.

More and more, he was becoming uncertain.

What was the enemy thinking?

Without putting a fight, they intended to come under Roland's control?

It seemed that monster named Remrus or such knew about Sion—no, about the **Hero** within Sion.

In that case, he should also know about the secrets of Sion's power.

His power that increased with every person who surrendered to him.

As the **Humans** created by the **Goddesses** came into contact with Sion and became **Human α**, with their inner structure being written, Sion's power multiplied in turn.

In other words, with the proposal that the Remrus Empire become the territory of the Roland Empire, Sion's power should increase tenfold at once, even though Remrus should've been trying to prevent that.

"Just what is his aim?"

Sion muttered, turning around.

The Roland soldiers' assault had yet to stop.

They continued to kill the Remrus soldiers who were trying to

escape.

27

Staring at that,

"... Damn it. What a despicable enemy,"

He said, groaning.

Then he gave an order to his subordinate.

"Cease with your attack. The enemy has surrendered. Tell Claugh to remain on standby where is. I'll be heading there. However, don't enter the Remrus Empire. Don't kill the enemy; capture them. You don't need to pursue anyone who retreats. The battle has been won. Send out the victory call,"

He said all at once.

In response, the subordinate nodded, and then distributed the duties among his surrounding allies.

And immediately, the victory call was sent out.

The Roland soldiers became animated all at once, yelling out in loud voices.

At the same time, they ceased with their attacks.

The **Raguru** invocation was cancelled.

Though the enemy continued to retreat nevertheless, the Roland soldiers no longer pursued them.

And after confirming that,

"....."

Sion motionlessly thought it over.

What he should do from here.

Where he should move to—

While glaring at the world that had suddenly transfigured, he thought it over.

Just now, this was likely Remrus's doing.

Though, regarding whatever had just happened, Sion didn't know if it was a sign that the world had been repainted in an unpleasant colour or not, Remrus had done something, and furthermore, he was trying to induce Sion into dancing on his territory.

At that, he—

"....."

However, again saying nothing, he narrowed his eyes up at the northern sky.

Chapter 1 - Confusion

Her chest hurt.

Her heart pounding wildly, as she grew tense with impatience, it felt as if her chest were about to split open.

And,

"What should I do?"

She murmured.

In a weak voice,

"What would be the best thing to do?"

Ferris Eris murmured.

Right now, she was at the entrance of Ryner's room.

By a large bed, which was completely covered in a mountain of documents.

However, Ryner's figure wasn't on top of the bed.

After all, he'd been abducted.

After all, he'd been abducted in front of her.

Furthermore, the one who'd abducted Ryner was a monster.

A monstrously strong enemy—not that kind of monster.

Ryner had been taken away by a literal, grotesque monster.

The monster that had suddenly appeared before Ferris was truly odd.

It was to the extent that, in the instant it appeared, she couldn't understand what it was, with a figure so different from a human's, and furthermore, it had an intimidating air to it.

And as it looked her way, it laughed.

It laughed as if there was something foolish.

Like that, Ferris had sliced apart one of the arms it'd extended.

Though she'd cut off that arm right away and tried to save Ryner, the area where the arm'd been sliced winded about and continued to attack Ferris.

And during the time that she was delayed with that arm, the monster spoke.

It spoke to Ryner in the room.

In a relaxed tone as if it were purely a friend of Ryner's,

"Ah, can I come in first?"

It said such a thing.

And Ryner easily accepted that.

Even thought they were clearly the words of a monster, Ryner easily accepted that.

Perhaps, some sort of magic had been used.

Ryner, accepting that monster, began a light-hearted conversation with it.

"This is far too messy."

"Because there's too much help.

Haha, well, it's not that different from my office~. Though you would know, Ryner."

"Geez, didn't I tell you!? Hurry up and explain yourself!"

Moreover, Ferris shouted.

Towards the room where Ryner, with the monster, was in, she shouted.

"Hey, Ryner! Who in the world are you talking to!?"

But there was no response.

Ferris was already so close when she'd shouted, and so there was no

way that guy couldn't have heard, and yet that idiot didn't reply.

Nevertheless, Ferris continued to frantically call out to him.

What are you doing?

Who in the world are you talking to? She frantically called out.

But it seemed as if Ryner wasn't hearing her voice.

Instead, he continued to talk with the monster.

Unconcerned, Ryner continued to talk with the monster.

"Even if you say to explain, I don't know where to start."

"From the beginning."

"From the beginning, huh? Hmm~, anyhow, Ryner, how do I appear to you?"

"Huh? You haven't changed at all from before, y'know?"

"From before?"

"Just like before, you look like an incredibly annoying, upstanding young man."

Ryner said.

Regarding what was clearly a monster, Ryner said, *"annoying, upstanding young man."*

And because of that, Ferris grew further impatient.

After all, there was only one person she associated with the description of an "annoying, upstanding young man."

Sion.

Sion Astal.

That work-loving, bully tyrant king who ruled over the Roland Empire.

And if, by any chance, Sion was here—

If, by any chance, Sion's come here, then I definitely have to open the

door too, right? She thought.

Even if Ryner doesn't, someone has to open the door, she thought.

After all, Sion—he was someone very close, and very important to them.

And Ryner easily opened the door.

Somewhere, Ryner's voice trembled. *He probably can't handle it and is crying now, isn't he?* She thought, if his voice was shaking that much.

And at that.

At Ryner's voice—

"....."

The monster laughed again.

It cackled.

It seemed like that laughter couldn't be heard by Ryner.

It seemed like that laughter of a monster who appeared to be deceiving Ryner couldn't be heard by him.

That was why Ferris desperately swung her sword. She sliced, and sliced, and sliced at the monster's arms, but as she was simply slicing with no end, she ignored the arms and ran through the corridor.

Towards Ryner's room.

Towards the room of the fool who'd been so easily deceived.

But while staring at her with numerous, wide eyes, the monster spoke in a cheerful voice.

Easily, as if confident in its victory, it said this.

"Haha, I see. That's how you see me... Then, that's a relief. I shouldn't be approaching a monster from a different dimension like you. But with this, it's checkmate. I've gotten a hold of the demon—a perfect victory for me,"

It said that.

Then finally, Ferris managed to reach the entrance of the room.

Shredding apart the monster's arms, she managed to reach the entrance of Ryner's room.

But by then, it was already too late.

In the room, neither the monster nor Ryner was there anymore.

All that remained was a dirty room that hadn't been cleaned whatsoever.

"....."

Ferris rushed into the room.

She entered the room with no one in it.

Even as she looked around, Ryner was unsurprisingly absent.

And she looked at the window that was provided in the room.

However, the window wasn't open.

Even the curtains weren't open.

Even though the only way to enter this room, barring the entrance where Ferris was currently standing, should've been the window, it wasn't open.

Despite that, Ryner wasn't there.

The monster wasn't there either.

And where they could've gone, she had no idea.

At that,

"Ryner,"

Ferris called his name.

But of course, there was no response.

"Ryner!"

Though she called his name again, there was only the sound of her own voice futilely echoing in the room, unsurprisingly.

"....."

This isn't good, she thought.

On top of her unease, she felt her chest hurt.

After all, it was clear that that monster wasn't anything pleasant.

After all, as something that shouldn't come into contact with humans, it wasn't anything pleasant.

Furthermore, it'd impersonated Sion. Evidently bearing ill will, it'd impersonated Sion.

This isn't good, she thought.

Ryner's been taken—this isn't good, she thought.

"....."

Alone in the room, she looked around restlessly.

But no matter where she looked, Ryner wasn't there.

Moreover, even though she knew it was pointless, she opened the window curtains.

Opening the window, she looked outside.

However, no one was there either.

As Ryner and co. had already disappeared completely, she didn't even know where to begin pursuing them.

At that,

"Damn it,"

Muttering that with a groan, she turned around.

She exited into the corridor.

But, as if using some sort of trick, the arms had vanished as well.

There weren't any leads.

Information on the enemy, Ryner's whereabouts—she knew nothing at all.

Instead, as if to prove that what had happened wasn't a dream or illusion, dango had fallen onto the corridor floor.

It was dango that she had specifically brought for Ryner, who was working unusually hard to understand the situation of the People's Republic of Sphelliyet.

She'd meant to enjoy that dango together with Ryner.

Quickly discovering the deliciousness of the dango, Ryner would be surprised, and then become excited.

But back when that monster had suddenly attacked, Ferris had dropped the package of dango.

Due to the impact upon falling, the package's wrapping paper had opened, causing the dango to scatter across the floor. Countless dango, having been stepped on her by her, left traces behind.

They could no longer be eaten.

Even though she'd gone through so much effort to determine which store in this neighbourhood had the greatest dango, Ryner had been abducted by that strange monster had and was no longer there.

At that.

"....."

Staring at the dango that wasn't edible anymore,

"....."

She muttered in a trembling voice.

"What should I do...?"

She muttered in a voice as if she were about to cry.

But as expected, there was no reply.

That idiot, Ryner, didn't respond.

She felt a strong fear take over her entire body.

She felt an intense sense of unease overwhelm her body.

After all, she didn't understand the situation.

Though someone, for some purpose, took Ryner away somewhere, she didn't understand any of it.

Like that, she couldn't go after them.

She couldn't go and save Ryner.

That was why she felt so anxious that it was as if her chest were about to split open.

To the throbbing area within her chest where unease swelled,

"... Damn it, stop that!"

She said, striking her chest.

But the swelling unease didn't stop. Unable to control her emotions, she felt like crying.

Ryner wasn't there—

Why that fact alone made her feel such a way, even she didn't know.

But she frantically pushed down on her chest.

Like this, with unease swelling inside of her, Ryner wouldn't be saved.

She wouldn't be able to chase after that fool.

Even if she didn't have any leads at all.

Even though she didn't know who had taken him or where he'd been taken to.

"... I'll find you, no matter what,"

She said, lifting her face.

Sliding her unsheathed sword back into the scabbard at her waist, she turned towards the end of the corridor.

However, unsurprisingly, Ryner wasn't there either.

Right now, as it was still morning, there were no signs of other people.

Where should she go?

She didn't even know of anyone she could ask if she wanted help.

However, she pushed down the unease in her chest. Replacing her pained expression, she maintained a blank face.

And she began to walk down the corridor.

First, she had to find allies in searching for Ryner.

At any rate, she needed information.

She didn't understand at all what was going on here.

That was why she needed personnel for the sake of gathering information.

And here, in the People's Republic of Sphelliyet that Vois had created, it seemed that she had no choice but to call that woman her ally.

That red-haired woman by the name of Kiefer Knolles.

That was why,

"....."

Ferris headed towards her room.

♦

Kiefer hadn't gone a wink of sleep last night.

"....."

Slightly rough, but in a girlish outfit to be seen as cute even if she ran into Ryner, with her bangs fixed in place with a hairpin—that sort of figure.

With that sort of figure, she was sitting at a desk with somewhat tired eyes, reading through documents about the People's Republic of Sphelliyet.

The structure of the country that Vois had created was rather well-organized; however, just from reading these, it seemed that it was constructed so that Vois had by far the advantage.

"... That kid really is sharp, huh?"

She muttered in admiration.

She'd left Roland several years ago in order to understand the mystery behind Ryner's eyes. Though she'd gone through many countries, she'd never seen a country so greedy for commerce the way the country that Vois had created was.

According to the documents on this country's objectives, then with this commerce, trade among territories would be vigorous, and whatnot.

"... Outwitting this kid and giving Ryner the advantage is going to be difficult, isn't it?"

While saying that, she let out a *Mu*~, stretching lightly.

"Well, in any case, we have to understand the situation first, and then deal with it afterwards."

Saying that, she again continued reading through the documents. Marking the parts that Ryner would want to read with a red pen, anything unnecessary was crossed out.

Aside from the parts that could be done by them alone, Toale and the remainder of Imperial Nelpha, regarding the matters that they could lend their power for, were being mobilized to places where Toale had displayed his uses.

Then again, new documents were brought forth.

By documents about how this People's Republic of Sphelliyet handled magic—this country had adopted various other countries' magic, at the same time that there was no confidentiality system for the research of magic, etc., and though that sort of thing was written down,

"... With Ryner and his **Alpha Stigma** that can read the structure of magic, then regarding the exploitation of this magic, Vois-kun intends to use that as a bargaining chip, huh? I'll have to discuss this with Ryner sometime,"

Kiefer muttered.

She circled that document with the pen.

And regarding that document, as she thought about discussing this with Ryner,

"....."

She instinctively felt like letting a satisfied smile spill through.

At any rate, she'd already been apart from him for such a long time.

In truth, she'd been by his side.

Even though she'd always been by his side, she'd been apart from him for over three years.

And during that period that she'd been apart, her feelings towards him had always, always remained inside of her.

Not even a day.

Or rather, there wasn't even a minute where she wasn't thinking of him.

And now that they'd finally reunited, she could act on his behalf.

Was there anything else besides this kind of happiness?

At that,

"....."

Alone, she instinctively smiled.

She was so happy that she smiled frivolously.

And slapping her cheeks with both hands for her lack of discipline,

"Now's not the time for that, self,"

She said to the air, laughing by herself.

Nevertheless, she couldn't help but be truly happy.

Or rather, living for herself like this—this was possibly the first time in her life that she'd felt this way.

When she'd infiltrated Roland as a spy from Estabul with her sisters, her older sister had then been killed, and her younger sister taken hostage.

And from then on, she'd always been living a lie.

Deceiving her friends, deceiving Sion, deceiving Ryner, she put up a cheerful smile every day. Hiding her expression that felt like crying, she forced a cheerfully smiling face.

When she left Roland, it'd been like that as well.

To find the power needed to save Ryner, she'd desperately gathered information.

If it was for that purpose, she lied however much she had to.

Lying about her status as she went from country to country, even to the king of the northern land of Gastark, she'd deceived them all.

But now, she was here.

She was by Ryner's side.

And this time, for his sake—for the sake of Ryner whom she loved, then she throw about her power.

If he made a face as if he were about to cry, then she could stay by

his side and soothe him.

If he was going through a rough time, then she could stay by his side and support him.

Though her older sister and younger sister had died.

Though all of her friends had died.

But nevertheless,

"....."

Nevertheless, she had never thought that the day would come when she would be glad to be alive.

That was why, at the moment, regarding her circumstances.

At the moment, regarding the circumstances of her, who was blessed,

"....."

She felt so fortunate that it was frightening.

Of course, it wasn't as if *everything* was going well, though.

For example, when it came to that unbelievably beautiful blonde-haired woman by Ryner's side and how Ryner thought about her, there was plenty to be uneasy about there.

But even in spite of that, she was happy right now.

Thus,

"If I don't work hard, I'll receive divine retribution~"

While saying such a thing, she began to work hard again.

She began to read through the documents.

However, all of a sudden,

"....."

Knock, knock!

There was a wild knocking at the door.

At that, Kiefer gave a start, jumping from her desk. As her entire body tensed, she assumed a combat pose.

It was her habit as a spy who'd been constantly travelling from country to country by herself.

Whenever an unexpected situation cropped up, it was if a vigilance switch had been turned on inside of her.

That said, she wasn't anywhere near Ryner's level, and so even if she assumed a combat pose, if the enemy were strong enough, she didn't know what she could do.

However, despite that, she tensed.

At any rate, this was right in the middle of enemy territory.

Though in the meantime, Vois had said that he was putting Ryner up as leader, she didn't know just how far that extended to.

That was why the situation should always be the same.

She had no allies.

Surrounded by enemies, she had no—

Then,

"No..."

Kiefer muttered.

And, here, there are two people that I can call my allies, right? She thought.

Ryner and Ferris.

Those two were her only allies.

She wasn't alone anymore.

Here, she had allies, and that Ryner's name was amidst them, she smiled faintly.

While glaring her eyes at the the door that was being knocked on heavily, she smiled, and then stuck out her tongue. Tense, she licked her dry, peach-coloured lips, and then held out both hands.

And getting ready to invoke an offensive spell from her motherland of Estabul,

"Who is it?"

She said, replying in a bright voice.

Having already assumed a combat stance, in order to ensure that the other party didn't realize that, she replied in a cheerful voice.

From the other side of the voice, there was a voice.

"It's me."

It was a woman's voice.

Furthermore, it was an emotionless, monotonous voice that she knew well.

It was Ferris Eris's voice.

Kiefer's eyes widened at that.

As the tension left her body,

"Ferris-san?"

"Correct. Open the door."

"Ah, sure. I don't mind, but what do you need at this hour?"

"Just hurry up and open the door."

"Okay,"

She said, raising her lowered stance as she stood up. Then she began moving towards the door.

However, suddenly,

"You're too slow. Hurry up,"

Ferris said.

But she shouldn't be able to open the door. It was locked. Of course, this was Vois and co.'s base, in the military residence of the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, so though Vois and co. had the key,

"Ferris-san, the key..."

Kiefer began, but suddenly, her words stopped there.

Out of the blue, before her eyes, there were multiple layers of light being unleashed.

And in the next moment, the door had been cut to shreds.

"Eh—!?"

Kiefer said, shocked.

But paying that no heed, as she held her sword in one hand, Ferris entered the room.

As always, she was a beauty.

Glossy, long blonde hair, ceramic-like white skin.

With her delicate body, she had an abnormally well-featured appearance.

Though Kiefer felt that this kind of beauty was her rival in love, she was overwhelmingly beautiful to the extent that Kiefer already felt like immediately withdrawing.

She looked at Kiefer's face.

Staring at her face that, as expected, had no trace of emotions,

"U-Um, Ferris-san?"

Kiefer said.

"Er... even if you hadn't sliced open the door, I would've opened it,"

She began, but unsurprisingly, Ferris ignored that and looked her way.

Then, with an unusual sort of restlessness, she looked around Kiefer's room as if confirming something.

She looked around at the desk, at the window, at the bed.

And again looking at Kiefer,

"Is Ryner here?"

She said.

Kiefer's eyes widened at that.

Ferris, in a strangely impatient manner, had come to ask something like, *Is Ryner here?*

On top of that, she'd come here in such a rush that she'd sliced apart the door and barged in the room.

Honestly, it was if she were a wife trying to catch her husband having an affair.

"Umm..."

Kiefer said, flustered.

While she was flustered, her thoughts began whirlin around regardless.

Because just from this conversation right now, there were a number of things she understood.

The fact that she would ask, *Is Ryner here?* suggested that he likely wasn't in his room right now.

And Ferris was looking for Ryner. However, she couldn't find him. Right now, it was nighttime, when most people within the country should be asleep. If Ryner weren't there at such an hour, what did that mean?

It couldn't be that he went to that red-haired woman's place?

Thinking that, with envy overtaking her, Ferris barged into her room—if it were that sort of development,

"... Unfortunately, Ryner hasn't come here. He's not in his room?"

Kiefer said.

Ferris shook her head at that.

"No, he was in his room."

In response, Kiefer's red eyes again widened.

"Ah... hmm. Ferris-san, at this hour... you were in Ryner's room?"

However, to that question,

"I was,"

Ferris replied without any timidness. She said that easily as if she didn't understand at all what those words could imply.

At that,

"....."

Competing with someone as childish as her is going to be difficult, isn't it~? Thinking things like that, Kiefer smiled ruefully in a troubled manner.

However, in any case,

"So, Ryner was in his room?"

Kiefer nodded.

"Yeah."

"Ah, he was there."

"Yeah."

"Hmm. In spite of that, Ferris-san, you came slicing apart my door?"

She asked, to which,

"However, before I went to his room, there was a visitor,"

Ferris said such a thing.

"A visitor?"

"Mm-hmm. It was a monster that had several eyes on its head and seven arms."

"Eh? Um, Ferris-san, what in the world are you talking about..."

She began, but as expected, Ferris ignored what she was saying and continued.

"It seems like it took on Sion's appearance so that it could talk to Ryner. Ryner himself opened the door for it."

"W-Wait a moment, wait a moment. That's..."

However, Ferris said everything at once. Giving Kiefer no chance to respond, she continued.

"And it took Ryner away. That monster took Ryner and vanished into thin air. When I burst into his room, Ryner was no longer there. While I thought that maybe, there was still a chance that he was still in this building, and searched for him, he isn't here. Though I thought that if it was all a dream and he'd gone to your room..."

Ferris said, staring at her, and then looked around the room once more. She looked at the desk, the bed, the window.

"As I thought, that actually happened?"

She said in a frustrated voice.

Regarding that,

"Um, um, hold on a moment. While I can't understand anything when you suddenly start talking like that, let me get this straight: Ryner's been taken away by someone?"

Kiefer asked, to which Ferris nodded.

"Correct."

"And, the one who took him away isn't human?"

"At the very least, it didn't appear human to me."

Ferris said; however, even if she said that, it was hard to believe immediately.

A monster with seven arms had appeared and abducted Ryner—that sort of impossible discussion...

"....."

However, Ferris's manner right now wasn't normal. Incredibly restless and troubled, she didn't look as if she were capable of composed judgment.

Even if she weren't like that, she's barged into Kiefer's room by slicing apart the door.

Already, she didn't look as if she were merely pulling some kind of joke.

In other words.

"....."

In other words, that Ryner had been abducted—that was the truth.

As that hit Kiefer, she began to feel panicked. She felt her entire body start to tremble.

Even though she was finally by Ryner's side, it seemed that something bad had happened to Ryner yet again.

"....."

However, she then killed her heart. She immediately disposed of the unease that was swelling up inside of her. After all, right now, if she were to lose her composure, it would all be over.

It was always like that.

Whenever something bad happened, she'd stop the movements of her heart again, as it was necessary to survey her entire body.

And she began to think.

What should she do?

How should she move?

If she made an error in her judgment, something unpleasant would occur.

Such as when her sisters were killed, when her friends were killed, Ryner being sent to prison, and becoming separated from one another.

Every moment of judgment, conduct, and choices all had to be decided on.

That was why.

"....."

That was why, even though her abilities were trivial, by staying

composed nevertheless, by staying calm, by keeping an eye over her body, she'd persevered.

Looking Ferris's way, she asked,

"Ferris-san?"

"What is it?"

"Are you calm right now?"

At such words, Ferris looked at her with a curious face and said,

"I'm always ca..."

"Don't lie. If Ryner's just been captured, then it wouldn't be surprising for you to not be calm."

"....."

"But you need to be. This situation might be a very unfortunate one for us. That's why, between the two of us, we need to stay calm and deal with this,"

Kiefer said.

Though Ferris looked as if she wanted to protest something about that,

"That's why I came to you,"

She easily said.

Kiefer nodded at that.

And she looked past the door that Ferris had shredded apart.

She looked towards the corridor.

It was still as silent as death within the central military building.

It seemed that the matter of Ryner having captured hadn't been relayed to others yet.

However, whether it was because no one else had noticed Ryner's abduction or whether it was done on Vois's orders, they had to figure out, she thought.

At any rate, this was enemy territory.

In that case, right now, confirming where they stood was the most pressing matter.

Thus,

"Ferris-san,"

Kiefer said.

"When you saw Ryner being abducted by a monster—how long ago was that?"

Ferris answered the question.

"Not too long ago."

"Hmm. Ferris-san, what do you think? Do you think it was one of Vois-kun's subordinates that captured Ryner?"

At that, Ferris looked at her with a *what are you talking about* kind of face, and,

"That thing didn't look like a human at a..."

However, interrupting that, Kiefer spoke.

"But it used magic on Ryner, didn't it? In that case, it might've used magic on itself as well to hide itself from you, Ferris-san."

"....."

"Ferris-san, do you think you could've been subjected to its magic?"

In response,

"... It could have. I don't know much about magic, after all."

Ferris said in a slightly apologetic voice; however, Kiefer shook her head.

"Don't make that face. It's not like you made a mistake, Ferris-san. After all, it even used magic against Ryner... if it's magic that was even used against Ryner, who possesses the **Alpha Stigma**, then there was nothing an ordinary mage could've done against it. To say nothing of Ferris-san, who doesn't use magic..."

Kiefer said, but then her words stopped there, as she examined the corridor again.

Thinking about how someone was examining their situation and plotting an attack against them, she turned her eyes towards the darkness of the corridor.

If someone had come and eavesdropped on them, then things were simple, though.

If, by any chance, someone were there, then that meant that the other party was human, she knew.

Furthermore, it was likely someone from Vois's side.

To create magic that could be used against Ryner would have been a considerably difficult task. On top of that, he wasn't simply an **Alpha Stigma** bearer.

During the war, his eyes had against transformed into something unique and strengthened his power further.

That was why, in order to use magic against Ryner, it would be necessary to lay out a comparable, large-scale magic trap.

For example, if everyone within the central military building had drawn out magic traps—

It was likely that even if they'd done that, Ryner's eyes would've seen through it.

That was why it was likely,

"....."

She didn't think that this was the work of Vois's subordinates.

That what had happened here wasn't the work of assassins or pursuers, she knew.

That Vois and co. could do anything against Ryner, let alone inflict any harm on him, or what Ferris had seen—it couldn't possibly be Vois's work.

No, otherwise, they couldn't afford to have Ferris and Kiefer become threats, could they?

There was a decent chance of that.

After all, if a mage around Kiefer's level tried attacking Ferris, there would be nothing they could do in general.

But, regarding that,

"... It's too quiet,"

Kiefer muttered.

Then Ferris looked at her, and,

"Do you want to take a look at Ryner's room?"

She said.

It was a dangerous gamble.

If this kidnapping were part of Vois's plan, then he would be expecting them to return to Ryner's room, where the chance existed that he would then capture Kiefer and Ferris as well. Naturally, though, going with that Kiefer had been thinking about earlier, it was also possible that he couldn't do anything against Kiefer and Ferris.

However, if they really were waiting for them, then that would be fine, she thought.

Because it meant that they'd know who the enemy was.

If they had the person who captured Ryner, then they'd be able to ask what they wanted to do with him.

And it'd be fine if they thought of a countermeasure for that moment.

But the worst development would be—

"....."

Kiefer could imagine.

She could imagine what the worst development would be.

That would be if Ryner truly had been abducted by an unknown monster.

The same as the **Goddesses** that Vois spoke of earlier, or the giant spider monster that had appeared during the battle against Gastark —a monster that held power such that humans could do nothing against it.

And if Ryner had been taken away by such a being, then already, they wouldn't be seeing him again—that kind of development.

They had to prevent that.

She rejected that line of thinking.

That she'd been separated from Ryner so easily.

Even though she was finally able to be with him again, Ryner suddenly wasn't there anymore.

She absolutely refused to accept that development where they could never meet again.

But then, Kiefer looked at Ferris.

Staring at her, who was unusually disturbed,

"....."

Then, for the first time, she felt like crying. Unease soaring up in the heart that she'd tried to kill, she felt that it'd become harder to breathe.

But, nevertheless, she frantically tried to return her trembling voice back to normal.

"Let's... go to his room. I know more about magic than you, Ferris-san, so I might discover some kind of lead..."

She said.

At that,

"I see,"

Ferris said.

She looked at Kiefer with slightly hopeful eyes.

Kiefer nodded at that, before leaving the room.

The two of them quickly headed over to Ryner's room.

Going through the corridor, they went up one storey.

During that time, they didn't run into anyone.

To begin with, it was clear that there weren't many people on this floor, which seemed to be used as a reception for visitors.

They advanced through that corridor with no signs of human presence or breathing.

And then, they managed to reach Ryner's room.

The door to his room was open.

Inside was terribly messy.

With books and documents were scattered on top of his bed, it was clear that Ryner had been working hard.

It was clear that the typically lazy Ryner had been working hard.

If this were simply a sight seen while Ryner was temporarily absent from his room, she'd probably think something like, *Cuuute.*

She'd probably think something like, *Geez, that Ryner—as soon as I'm not around, he's a slob*.

Because it was like that a long time ago.

From when we were in the Roland Empire Royal Military Academy, Ryner was terrible at keeping his room in order, so if I didn't do it for him, it'd get increasingly messy.

"....."

However, now, Ryner wasn't there.

And there wasn't any lead whatsoever.

There weren't even any traces of magic being used. At the very least, nothing that Kiefer could find.

Then,

"How is it?"

Ferris asked.

Her voice sounded uneasy. A voice with both hope and unease mixed in it.

Kiefer shook her head at that.

Then, quietly,

"I see,"

Ferris said.

And she turned on her heel. She moved to leave the room.

Regarding that, Kiefer asked,

"Where are you going?"

Ferris replied,

"I'm going to look for Ryner."

"So like I said, where?"

"Who knows? But I'm going."

Saying that, she left the room.

While staring at where Ferris used to be for a while,

"... That's not what you should do,"

Kiefer muttered.

"When you don't have any leads, that's not what you should do,"

She muttered.

That was her wish.

What she wanted.

If she were to stop moving here, then she'd never be able to see Ryner again. That was why,

"... There—there has to be something that I can do,"

She said, as she began thinking hard.

Repressing the anxiety that would swell immediately if she allowed it to, while feeling like crying, she thought over things with all her might.

Even if she wasn't the sharpest person around, she desperately willed herself to think of something.

"....."

She stared at the room.

Here, there'd been Ryner with, rather than a human, a monster.

A monster with several eyes and seven arms.

It was, without a doubt, an ally of the giant spider monster that had appeared during that battle and of the **Goddesses**.

Ryner, because of his eyes—because he obtained those eyes with that teardrop pattern—was now being targetted by those kinds of monsters.

In that case, shouldn't I talk with someone well-informed on that sort of monster?

She thought.

Perhaps Vois might already know about the monster that had attacked Ryner.

In that case, if she asked Vois—however, thinking that, she shook her head. In the first place, this was Vois's territory. Thus, it was possible that the enemy was connected with Vois.

Not to mention that we're here to put an end to Vois's authority. I doubt that kid would allow that so easily.

In that case, there was a chance that Vois was an enemy.

Then, is there anyone else I can trust?

Is there anyone else in this world who'd know about atypical monsters like that?

Thinking that, just one person she could count on came to mind.

Riphal.

The Hero King of the Gastark Empire, Riphal Edea.

Someone whom she'd just betrayed.

But, if there was the chance that she could save Ryner.

If there's the chance that I can save Ryner, who's been captured by a peculiar monster, she thought.

Thus, she also left the room.

And she began following after Ferris who'd already left the room. Then, she was able to catch up with her immediately.

Like Kiefer, she was also making a face that suggested that she was deep in thought.

Kiefer spoke to Ferris.

That there was still hope.

That they could still find a way to find and save Ryner,

"Ferris-san! Someone who maybe, just maybe, can save Ryner—I know of someone!"

She exclaimed.

Ferris turned around.

"Oh. How unexpected. I also thought of someone whose help I was thinking about asking for."

She said such a thing.

And Kiefer was surprised at that.

After all, she hadn't considered that there was someone other than Riphal who could figure out what had happened just now.

However, Riphal and Ferris shouldn't be acquainted. In that case, who in the world was she thinking of consulting with?

Whom she did intend on asking for help?

Kiefer asked that.

That said, she could essentially guess what her reply would be.

She was likely thinking of consulting with Vois. If it was Vois, then certainly, more or less, he might have some information on what went on.

But Vois was no good.

Whether he was an ally or enemy, they still didn't know.

That was why consulting with Riphal was—

She thought, but aside from the thoughts that were self-centeredly developing in her mind, Ferris spoke.

Staring at Kiefer,

"I'm going to go to Roland to meet with Sion. If it's him, then without a doubt, he should be willing to save Ryner."

She said such a thing.

WIthout thinking,

"... Eh?"

Kiefer let her voice slip.

After all, that was a name that she wasn't expecting to hear at all.

Sion—at hearing that name and the mention of Roland, Kiefer unintentionally stopped moving.

To her, those two were very heavy matters.

The name of the country that had killed her sisters.

And the name of the friend whom she'd betrayed.

Furthermore, at the moment, that Sion was no longer on speaking terms with Ryner and Ferris, and on top of that, he'd been invading and going to war with other countries.

On the contrary, Sion had launched **Rhule Fragmei** on the civilians and military forces of Nelpha, whom Ryner now led.

With that, tens of thousands of people had died.

It wasn't just soldiers.

Women, children, everyone.

That wasn't the Sion that Kiefer knew.

No, even for Ryner who'd always been with Sion, that wasn't the Sion he should've known.

What was happening in Roland right now, she had no idea.

No, Riphal had said this. When he'd let Kiefer leave Gastark, he'd told her this.

"Before Ryner's betrayed. Before the gate, drenched in despair and darkness, is opened... I want you to take him away from Roland."

He said that.

At that time, she couldn't understand most of what he was saying.

On top of that, he'd said that Ryner would be devoured by Sion as a sacrifice. He'd said that that was the key for the sake of opening the gate in Roland.

And he'd said that Ryner would become that key and suffer for all of eternity, unable to die.

Each and every word was about how Sion was deceiving Ryner, and whatnot.

And the reality was, it wasn't like that.

Chased out by Sion, Ryner had left Roland.

Despite that, he'd said that.

Ryner had said that.

He said that, nevertheless, he wanted to save Sion.

If, somehow, Sion's fallen apart, then I'll put him back together, he said.

But one wouldn't think that things would proceed so smoothly.

Ryner's voice didn't reach Sion.

It didn't reach him at all.

That was why, right now, even if Ferris and Kiefer asked him for help, one wouldn't think Sion would respond.

No, if it were the Sion that Kiefer knew, he'd definitely help.

If it were the Sion whom Kiefer had spent time together with in the Roland Empire Royal Military Academy.

If it were the Sion who'd spent time togther with Ryner, he'd definitely help.

The Sion that Kiefer knew would never abandon his friends.

But right now.

"....."

Right now, the situation had changed.

Surely, Sion had fallen into some sort of unknown darkness.

He'd fallen in with monsters like the one that had captured Ryner, that humans could do nothing about.

And everything about him had become strange.

Already at the point where he couldn't go back, everything had become strange.

That was why,

"... Would Sion, as he is now..."

Meet with us?

Kiefer meant to ask that.

However, before Kiefer could finish, Ferris spoke.

Without hesitation,

"If we tell him about Ryner's situation right now, he'll help."

"But—"

"He'll help."

Ferris, in a tone that was entirely certain of herself, said that.

In response,

"....."

Kiefer stopped talking.

And thoughts began to arise.

A scene of the past.

Already in the past, it was a scene she yearned for.

Fahl, Toni, and Tyle were there. They were part of the same team in the academy, though they were friends who died because Kiefer betrayed them, they were smiling.

Amidst them, Kiefer was smiling as well.

Sion was also smiling.

And by Sion's side, with a lethargic expression, Ryner loitered around boredly.

"..."

It was a happy scene.

Of course, back then, her younger sister was being held hostage by Roland's nobility, and so she'd always been betraying Sion and her friends, however.

But while looking at the smiling faces of her temporary friends.

While in the Roland Empire that was, for merely a moment, in a ceasefire with the Kingdom of Estabul.

She was happy.

She was at peace.

While her little sister was being held hostage, while Kiefer was faintly aware that she might've been killed—in spite of all that, she immersed herself in the springtime of her life and the happiness of

being by Ryner's side.

That was her worst memory.

Being all too aware of her own weakness, it was her worst, yet nevertheless missed, memory.

And she recalled that time.

Then, Sion was also smiling.

Even though, back then, he held absolutely nothing, he was dancing in the nobles' hands, and he didn't have nearly enough power to protect his allies, Sion was still smiling.

Follow me, he said.

I'll change this world, he said.

And in truth, he did.

He became Roland's king, and changed the country.

He changed the world.

Though what kind of face he was making, she no longer knew.

But, if it were the Sion from back then—

"....."

Then,

"So, the person that you thought of who could figure this out—who is it?"

Ferris asked such a thing.

Kiefer raised her head at that.

Away from the scene of her past, her consciousness returned to the world of reality.

And at that, Kiefer looked at Ferris and responded.

"I also..."

She replied.

"I also think it's fine if we head over to Sion. If it's Sion, then for sure... for sure, he'll save Ryner,"

She replied.

At that, with just a slightly relieved expression, Ferris nodded with an *mm-hmm*, and then turned her back to her.

"All right, let's head to Roland."

"Right. But, um, the journey's preparations..."

"We'll do them along the way."

"What about money?"

However, to that,

"We don't need money."

To such outrageous words, Kiefer laughed, and,

"Well, if we need it, we can always steal it, but I don't think we're going to be able to leave this country so easily～"

She said, taking out the small purse she always carried in her chest. Inside, she had the currency of various countries and her identification papers.

Right now, in this place, Ryner, Kiefer, and Ferris had forged identification papers. Permits for the sake of crossing the borders of other countries, trader issues, permits that allowed them to go from country to country as traders, so that they could immediately enter the People's Republic of Sphelliyet—she'd obtained them.

As she'd always gone around double-crossing everyone in the world, she wouldn't make such an oversight.

She handed over some identification papers and trading permits to Ferris.

Taking them, Ferris looked her way, and,

"Hmm. Pretty good."

She said such things, to which Kiefer smiled sweetly.

"Hurray, I was praised."

At that, staring at her,

"Incidentally, woman, what's your name?"

As she asked that, Kiefer shrugged.

"Eh, from now? Um, I..."

However, at that,

"Putting that joke aside—Kiefer, let's go."

Saying that, Ferris resumed walking.

She, who up until now, had always said "red-haired woman" instead of using her actual name, called Kiefer by her name for the first time.

In response, Kiefer stared at Ferris's back, and,

"... Ri~ght. Even though I've been acknowledged by my rival in love as an ally~"

She muttered.

"But it does make me just a bit happy,"

She said, smiling dimly.

Then she put her purse away. And regarding the rough outfit she was wearing at the moment, *This isn't suitable for a journey, huh?* She thought. It was practically nightclothes. When it came to stealing clothes and shoes—*no, but I can use the combat uniform Vois-kun gave me, right?* After thinking about that and whatnot,

"Ah, ah, Ferris-san,"

Kiefer said.

However, Ferris didn't stop.

After staring at her back with a troubled face, Kiefer smiled, and,

"Ferris,"

She said, seeing how it would go without honorifics.

The other party didn't use honorifics either. Therefore, *why not?* she figured, and dropped them.

Then,

"....."

Ferris stopped.

Even though she easily called Kiefer's name without any honorifics, for some reason she made a slightly unpleased face as she turned around, and,

"What?"

She said, at which Kiefer smiled.

Then beckoning her with her finger,

"Come to my room. We can make preparations for the journey,"

She said.

Ferris shook her head.

"No. We don't have ti..."

"Come on, come on. Come with me, Ferris,"

She said, as Ferris again stared at her, vaguely knitting her eyebrows.

However, Kiefer ignored that and simpy put on a smile. And like that, she began walking. Leaving Ferris's side, she headed towards her room.

At that, without saying anything, Ferris obediently followed.

That reaction of hers was cute.

While brandishing that kind of stubborn attitude, that she would ultimately follow along obediently was cute.

"....."

Kiefer thought.

Ah, so Ferris-san really is—she's a tough rival in love, she thought.

But a conflict was about to start up again.

Right now, they had to search for Ryner.

In order to search for the missing Ryner, towards the Roland Empire—

Kiefer turned around once, and after looking at Ferris,

"....."

All right, she inwardly muttered, determined.

Chapter 2 - Human

"Eh~, good grief, what is this?"

Vois Fiurelle said, raising his voice in a sulking manner.

Pretty black hair, intelligent black eyes. Dressed in miko-like garb, he was a boy who looked to be around thirteen or fourteen.

Right now, that boy was inside the central military building of the capital of the country that he'd quickly established, the People's Republic of Sphelliyet.

While walking down the corridor, Vois, in an oddly troubled manner, scratched at his tidy black hair.

Then he read the report that his subordinate Harmit possessed.

In that report, this kind of thing was written.

—Ryner Lute, Ferris Eris, and Kiefer Knolles have fled.

Staring at those words, Vois knitted his eyebrows, and,

"Why~ has it turned out like this?"

He said, turning around, where a beautiful woman with an apologetic expression was.

Vois's subordinate, Harmit Wolf.

Long black hair, navy blue eyes. A tall, slender body adorned in a combat uniform.

Harmit spoke with a meek face.

"Due to my incompetence..."

"I'm not interested in apologies, you know. Just tell me the truth. What happened?"

"That's..."

"You don't know? You were keeping an eye on them, of course?"

"Yes."

"But they shook you off?"

"... Yes."

"When you noticed that they were no longer there, it was just a short while ago? After I came back?"

"... Yes."

"The investigation?"

"Presently..."

She began, but Vois interjected with,

"Don't bother. I'll do it myself."

With that order, Harmit hurriedly gave commands to a male subordinate in the waiting. Then, the man began running.

But ignoring that,

"Hmm,"

Vois said, while crossing his arms, as he walked down the corridor, pondering.

Where he was headed right now was the one who should be located closest to where they were now: the room given to Ferris.

While heading there,

"... How~ever, this is strange, isn't it? Given the current state of affairs, there shouldn't be anywhere other than here that they would go to, and furthermore, Ryner-san and the others should've seen perfectly that, with the effective government, what a nice place this is, with the information and restrictions given to them... correct?"

He said, looking at Harmit again as if seeking affirmation.

Harmit nodded.

"That was the intention."

"But they've left. Now then, now then, what should we do from here?"

He said, finally reaching Ferris's room.

Unless Harmit's information was incorrect, Ferris had left the country.

And as Harmit had no reason to lie to him,

"... My, my, she really isn't there,"

Vois said in a troubled manner. Then he entered the room.

Inside the room was the wrapping paper of various shops' dango from within Sphellilans that she'd apparently gone around buying, and on the back of each paper, the impressions of that dango were written.

Picking up one sheet,

"... The south Sapruno shopping district's dango shop, Pippi Dango, wasn't stocked up properly, so negative points for them,"

Vois read.

Then looking over his shoulder at Harmit,

"Did you know that Pippi Dango isn't any good?"

He asked, to which she shook her head. Regretting her own faults as always, she made an awkward expression.

Looking at that somewhat weak face of Harmit's,

"... Haha,"

Vois said, grinning.

Always acting gallent, like the difficult-to-fluster Kiefer, having her make an apologetic expression like this,

"Like this, it's something that comes firmly, though. But..."

Right now, the fact that Ryner isn't here anymore is bad, he muttered

inwardly.

Though Harmit's face, looking as if she wanted to say something, twisted further—*well, that it'd go that far is, as one would expect, pitiful.*

But nevertheless, the fact that Ryner Lute was, at the moment, no longer there was especially bad.

After all, right now, Vois was, day by day, spreading out a delicate negotiation with the rest of the world.

Or rather, if one were to look at just what happened here over the last two weeks, then definitely, it would look to them as if, out of everyone in the world, it was him who was the busiest, wasn't it? For example,

- Proclaiming Ryner as the Demon King to the world.

- Conquering and dividing the Geihlficlant Empire's territory.

- Binding various countries through a peace treaty by proposing a ban on **Rhule Fragmei**.

- Furthermore, getting that queen of the **Azure Princess Mercenaries**, Pia Varliere, on his side.

And such, already, he'd been working hard day and night and had finally just returned to his own country.

Afterwards, while indulging himself by frequently teasing Ryner, Ferris, and Kiefer, though he'd intended to capture the world at once,

"... Why~ is it that everyone must act on their own without thinking?"

As he said that, Harmit again looked down with a pained expression, at which Vois laughed.

"It's not your fault."

"But—"

"I said that it's not your fault, so it's not your fault. And the leader's

words are absolute, aren't they?"

"....."

Harmit, at that, lifted her face to look at him.

Vois smiled at that.

Well, right now, it honestly wasn't her fault. With her power, she wouldn't have been able to stop Kiefer, generally-speaking, and Ryner and Ferris.

No, amidst his pawns, when it came to someone who could stop someone of Ryner and Ferris's level, there was no one.

That was why it wasn't an error on Harmit's part.

In other words, what was strange wasn't that Ryner and co.'s intentions and actions weren't dealt with, so if there was a mistake in his plan, then maybe,

"... Something beyond my predictions, an irregular situation occurred here, hmm～?"

He said, throwing away the dango package and directing his eyes towards Ferris's belongings. Moreover, he pointed towards the room's closet, and,

"Harmit, open the closet,"

He ordered.

At that,

"Understood,"

Nodding as she said that, she moved towards the closet and opened it.

Regarding that, Vois spoke.

"What's inside?"

"Clothes."

"Underwear?"

To the question, after pulling out several drawers, Harmit said,

"They're here."

"What colour?"

"Eh?"

"What colour are Ferris-san's panties?"

"... E-Er, they're white and pink."

"Hmm. I see. It would've been nice if they were black or red, huh?"

While saying such things, Vois looked at Harmit's back with a bored expression. Like that, he exited into the corridor and began walking.

And he thought over things.

He thought over what it meant that Ferris's clothes and underwear had been left behind.

By the time that Harmit had noticed, Ryner, Ferris, and Kiefer were no longer there. Completely evading the surveillance on the second floor, they'd left the area.

In other words, they should have been able to take their clothes and belongings with them. In spite of that, Ferris didn't take anything with her.

At that, again,

"This is bad, huh?"

Vois muttered.

Somehow, Ryner and co.'s disappearance, being unable to stomach this place, didn't seem to have any logic behind it.

Seeing as how they should've taken their belongings with them, it seemed that a situation beyond his predictions had occurred.

Now then, what would that be?

"....."

Slipping through the corridor, Vois headed to Ryner's room.

The door to Ryner's room was wide open.

Inside the room was a mess.

The bed was buried under books and documents, and there were traces of a drink spill here and there.

Looking at the books and documents, because of Harmit, that the information given to Ryner had been manipulated, he knew.

In other words, by the things that Vois was doing, the affairs that he didn't want Ryner to know about shouldn't have been conveyed to him.

"... Hmm,"

He said, looking around the room.

At the bookshelf, the window, the desk, the bed.

However, there were no clues as to where Ryner had gone. Furthermore, all of his belongings had been left behind as well.

If Ryner and the others truly had left the country, then without making any preparations, they would've left empty-handed.

Regarding that,

"....."

Exiting the room with a thoughtful expression,

"All right, I've inspected Ryner-san and Ferris-san's rooms. Investigate as to why there are no leads,"

Vois ordered Harmit.

Harmit nodded, and then turned to a young boy behind them in stand-by. That boy began running.

But unsurprisingly, Vois wasn't interested in that.

Now, he headed over to Kiefer Knolles's room.

The state of Kiefer's room was slightly different from the other two's.

First of all, the door had been shredded to pieces.

On top of that, it was an iron door.

Though it was a door where the lock had been camoflauged so that it couldn't be seen, with the lock actually being on the outside, so that one could lock any guests inside the room.

"... Agaaain, it's been cleanly sliced apart, huh?"

He said, entering the room.

Kiefer's room, unlike Ryner and Ferris's rooms, was tidy.

Prudent in the cleaning, there wasn't a speck of garbage. As if she'd been researching something, books and documents had been sorted and arranged.

Furthermore, amidst that collection was documents on affairs that Vois hadn't wanted them to see.

"Oh~, oh~, this is... heh, Kiefer-san is more capable than I thought,"

Vois said in admiration.

Anyhow, that she'd evaded Harmit's surveillance and had gathered this amount of information,

"She might be an unexpectedly good find."

While saying that, Vois wandered around her room, searching for Kiefer's belongings.

However, she hadn't left her belongings behind.

Neither her clothes nor her underwear remaining, everything had completely disappeared, and conscientiously, her bed had been made.

That was to say, for Kiefer, leaving the country had been of her own will.

"... Now then, what can be understood from this situation?"

He muttered.

Ryner and Ferris had vanished while leaving their belongings behind, but Kiefer had left with preparations for a journey.

Consequently, what in the world was the meaning of that?

While thinking over that, he lay down on Kiefer's bed in the meantime. Sleepiness hitting him immediately, he was aware of his own, notable tiredness.

Regarding that sleepiness, enduring it as he closed his eyes, he spoke to Harmit at the entrance of the room.

"Harmit."

"Yes?"

"Shall we sleep together～?"

"Understood. If that is what Vois-sama desires,"

She said, but to her who was approaching, Vois spoke.

"But, Harmit, as there's still work to be done, I'm not letting you sleep with me～"

"Eh..."

"Look at what's on the desk. Kiefer-san has been escaping your surveillance, Harmit, and investigating the backstage of this country～"

As he said that, Harmit looked at the desk. Looking at the countless documents there, her face paled.

"M-My apologi..."

She began, but without letting her finish, Vois said,

"That's why I'm forbidding you from sleeping with me."

"U—"

"As punishment, Harmit, investigate this room. As it looks like Kiefer-san left of her own will, there might be a clue left behind. As expected, I've hit my limits, just a bit, so I'm going to sleep, but if you don't find anything by the time I wake up, Harmit..."

Suddenly, Vois's eyes opened, as if jolting himself out of a dream, and,

"I'll be angry?"

He said.

At that,

"Au,"

Harmit said in a frightened voice. The sound of her frantically investigating the documents on the desk rang out.

While nodding in satisfaction, Vois embraced the pillow tightly.

"What does Kiefer-san smell like?"

While saying such things, he was about to go to sleep, but then he felt his hand touch something paper-like.

At that, Vois faintly opened his eyes.

"Ah, what's this? The ingenious me found a clue while sleeping,"

He said, taking out a sheet of paper from under the pillow.

It was a sheet of paper that looked to have some kind of message on it.

Likely a message from Kiefer Knolles.

Vois read it.

In that message, this sort of thing was written.

"To Vois-kun. As we are unable to believe in you, we've decided to quietly leave the country. However, if by any chance you intend to help us, then please send a message to the inn in the Sul village of the Heilmuss Republic to the west. There's only one inn. From there, you'll obtain a means of contacting us. Please do not try and tail us. In the event that we notice such a tail, we will be unable to believe in you once more. If you wish to gain our confidence, then please display your good will—"

Reading up until there, Vois spoke.

"Quite a long preface, isn't it...? But she truly is amazing. I'd like for her to be one of my direct subordinates,"

He muttered.

He continued reading the message.

With this, regarding what had just happened, that was written.

Kiefer said this.

"Now then, I'll write only about what occurred here. Ryner has been abducted by a monster. The monster's outward appearance involves a spherical head with countless eyes. It seems that its body has seven arms. Ferris-san was the one who saw it. Though there is a chance that an illusionary spell was being used, there's also the chance that it's a monster in reality. If you happen to know of such a monster or a mage that could cast an illusion over Ryner, contact us. We're pursuing Ryner."

The message ended there.

And Vois, with a frustrated expression, stared at that paper.

Then he looked up at Harmit, who was still desperately searching for clues.

She was looking through the documents and then putting them aside, pulling open the desk drawers, looking inside; however, it didn't seem as if she was discovering anything, and so had a troubled face.

While dimly watching that,

"....."

However, he didn't tell her that he found a lead.

Instead, he thought over the contents of that message.

And he did have some information on the monster written about in the message.

Countless eyes on a spherical head.

A body with seven arms—though that was what was written, he had information on a being resembling that.

Called the **Crawling God** by the **Goddesses**, an old god—Remrus Remuld Aarqued.

Reigning over the Remrus Empire, a grotesque monster.

If he recalled correctly, it had seven eyes through which it saw the world and six arms.

"... But the amount of eyes and arms don't quite match up..."

That said, if it took Ryner-san away so easily, then it's likely Remrus, isn't it? He thought.

Though the **Crawling God** didn't have that much power, there were practically no other myth or folklore-like beings aside from the **Goddesses**, **Hero**, and **Demon** remaining.

"... This is quite the unexpected ambush that's appeared, isn't it? Remrus has gotten involved rather quickly..."

Vois said, rising from the bed.

Harmit looked surprised at that, and then,

"M-My apologies, I've yet to find a..."

Interrupting that,

"No, the clues that have already been found are enough,"

He said, tossing the message in Harmit's direction.

As Harmit caught it, she began reading.

However, unsurprisingly ignoring that, Vois exited the room.

And he thought over things.

Ryner—no, the People's Republic of Sphelliyet's trump card of a **weapon** [Ryner Lute] had been stolen by Remrus.

That was especially bad.

After all, the fact that Ryner was here was what protected this country of the People's Republic of Sphelliyet's right to speak to the rest of the world.

Obliterating a million lives in an instant, a demon king that possessed enough power to stop the war between the Gastark Empire and Geihlficlant Empire—as the world thought that, then despite the People's Republic of Sphelliyet's small numbers in soldiers, their people were able to take a short rest without being attacked.

However, if Ryner Lute were to be abducted by the Remrus Empire, and if other countries were to learn of this, what would happen?

"....."

It was likely that they'd simultaneously be attacked by neighbouring countries.

First, the Geihlficlant Empire that had been divided into northern and southern divisions would come to reclaim their territory.

Furthermore, the Ertolia Republic and Gastark Empire that had captured territory of the weakened Geihlficlant Empire would come and attack at once.

On the contrary, small countries that had been relying on the three superpowers might also take this chance to participate in the war.

If they knew that the **Demon King** [Ryner] wasn't here, then the Geihlficlant Empire and the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, exhausting itself with a civil war, was nothing more than a divided country.

Neighbouring countries wouldn't overlook this chance.

Of course, the military forces of the Anti-Roland Coalition that Vois led possessed many **Rhule Fragmei**, but Gastark was the same.

In that case, there was the possibility that they'd use Glovil against them. Right now, the other party had vastly greater numbers in terms of soldiers. On top of that, it seemed that, as if using a **Rhule Fragmei** that could control the soldiers' feelings in an instant, even when there was flat-out friendly fire in the war, Vois and co.'s soldiers had no chance at winning with their power.

In other words, it'd be bad if it was leaked out to other countries that Ryner wasn't here. And though, before that was revealed, they had to rescue Ryner from Remrus,

"Now then, how to move when the enemy is a monster?"

He said, narrowing his eyes.

Remrus shouldn't be too great of a foe.

Compared to the **Goddesses**, the **Crawling God** should have always been a low-grade, powerless god.

And he also possessed tools that could kill even the **Goddesses**.

He also possessed god-killing relics known as **Rhule Fragmei**.

If he used them, then a monster of Remrus's level shouldn't be able to do anything.

But the problem was,

"The problem is that why did Ryner-san get taken away so easily if the opponent was a lowly god of that degree, hmm? Did it lure him away with the panties of a girl as bait?"

While muttering such foolish things, he continued to think with a serious expression nevertheless.

Truly, the incident that had happened just now was beyond his predictions.

The matter of Remrus wasn't one that Vois had seen fit to pay much attention to. No, up until just a short while ago, the **Goddesses** who meant to make use of him were fools who thought that it was enough to manipulate humans.

Naturally, though, a monster's power far surpassed that of a human's, and while he was aware of that in itself, he still hadn't paid much attention to it.

Rather, aside from the fact that, being located north of Roland, the Remrus Empire had become an obstacle to the other country, he hadn't thought about it.

But Ryner had been taken away.

Ryner, who should've obtained enough power to frighten the **Goddesses**, had easily been taken away.

Though he didn't know what kind of trap or illusion had been prepared in order to do that, Remrus, who was scorned by the **Goddesses**, had done that, and he'd certainly have laid out various other plans—

"Damn it. Again, the enemies aside from the **Goddesses** and the **Hero** have increased?"

Vois said, groaning.

And he wanted to blame the naivety of his own thoughts. Well, even if he blamed himself, he didn't think he could've stopped what had happened this time.

No, because he knew that enemies who wanted to obtain Ryner's power like himself were gathering, maybe he should've put up some guards.

For example, assigning Ferris as a guard to Ryner who possessed one **Rhule Fragmei**, or something like that.

But as he hadn't expected Ryner, with his degree of power, to be taken away so simply, he hadn't assigned any such guards.

"I was naive... but even if I regret it now, there's nothing that can be done about it. However, I have to take measures immediately now. Now then, what to do..."

He began, but then suddenly, a different subordinate barged out of a room. And upon locating Vois, in a desperate manner,

"Vois-sama! An enemy has attacked! Please escape imme..."

However, his words ended there.

The upper half of the subordinate's body was devoured and torn to shreds by some sort of black shadow monster, and so became no more.

And that monster turned this way.

Made of shadows, it was a gigantic wolf-like monster.

With only one glance, he could tell that it was a monster born from

a **Rhule Fragmei**.

And upon looking this way, the beast opened its mouth wide, before attacking him.

"Wah, wah, Harmit!"

Vois called out.

Harmit lifted her face at this and reacted. Withdrawing the sword at her waist, she moved to save him.

The monster then looked at Harmit.

Vois took that opportunity to jump back. Furthermore, he took a knife out from his pocket. Then, he flung it to the floor.

In that instant, the knife separated into four pieces and pierced through the left and right walls, the ceiling, and the floor. And with those four pieces in the cardinal points, a thinly translucent film of light was spread out, isolating the monster away from Vois.

The monster was stopped by that film, and,

"Gah—"

In the moment that it let out a cry, its body was already disappearing.

Looking at that,

"Oh~, that was close,"

Vois said, letting a bit of emotion leak into his voice.

Then he turned towards the entrance of the room that the monster had entered from.

There, at the room's entrance, he saw a lone man appear.

It was likely the man manipulating the shadow monsters.

Long, smooth and pretty jet-black hair. A thin, tall body. Though his face was surprisingly well-featured, anyone who saw him wouldn't feel that, with his icy, dark blue eyes.

With eyes as if he were completely looking down at everything, he

looked down at Vois, and,

"Ah, how unfortunate that was just now,"

He said in a horribly dark voice.

In response, Vois looked up at the man, and,

"You are?"

He asked, to which the man smiled.

And, with open red lips entirely like a demon's,

"I'm not someone who would introduce himself,"

He said such a thing, at which Vois shrugged and spoke.

"An assassin from Gastark?"

"Ah, I've been expo..."

"No, that's not it, is it? After all, Gastark's **Rhule Fragmei** user would have pink hair. And to manipulate that shadow beast—that's a type of **Rhule Fragmei** that can only be used by the chosen bloodline, isn't it? That is, you aren't an assassin from Gastark. In that case, where are you an assassin from?"

At that, while cheerfully smiling, the man caressed his own black hair.

"I dyed it,"

He said such a thing.

Vois smiled in response and spoke.

"Heh. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Then you must be an assassin from Gastark, huh? In that case, if it's a precious assassin from Gastark, it's fine for me to say this. The film of this **Rhule Fragmei** separating us cannot be broken by a relic. But rather, there's only one way to break it. Do you know what that is?"

The man looked up at the film of light that spread across the center of the room.

"Now then, what should I do?"

He asked, and so Vois told the man.

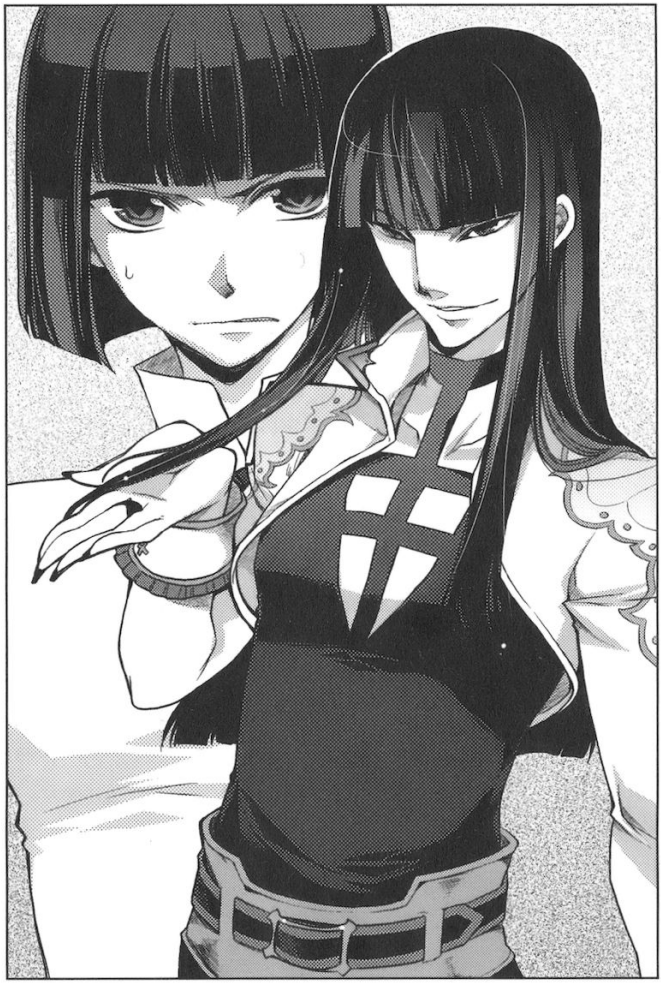
"Though this holds up against the laws of nature and against relics, it's weak only to magic, you see. So if you use magic, it'll be troubling~"

He said that.

At that, the man looked his way, and,

"... Do you expected me to be deceived by such nonsense?"

Vois answered,



"That should be my line. Someone from Gastark? You dyed your hair? If that's the truth, then let me see you use magic. Come on, draw your prided grid pattern, and invoke your magic~"

However, at that, the man didn't move to use magic.

Well, he'd known from the beginning that this guy wasn't from Gastark, so it wasn't as if this was a new piece of information.

Vois stared at the man, and,

"So, what does an assassin from Roland want with me?"

He said.

That was the scythe that he applied.

If he reacted to the mention of Roland, then Vois would know where this guy came from.

However, the man's face didn't as so much twitch. Instead, with a cold expression, he stretched out his hand, and,

"Let there be darkness,"

He said.

The shadow at the man's feet stretched, and one beast was formed. Furthermore, it was a beast that was far larger than the previous one.

That beast lunged at the film of light spread across the room.

And that light, for a moment, for only a moment, wavered faintly; however, again, the beast disappeared.

And watching that,

"....."

Not good, Vois thought.

Just now, the film's special trait might have been revealed, he thought.

If this film were struck by a certain level of power or higher, it was possible to break through it.

Of course, if it were attacked by a normal sword or spell, it wouldn't matter much, but.

Then suddenly,

"That messenger girl that you sent to us, of the Roland Empire—I killed her."

The man revealed the country from which he came.

At that, Vois felt increasingly more that this was not good.

This man had already discovered the way to break through the film. And he possessed enough power to kill Vois.

That was why he so easily revealed the country that he came from.

To that,

"....."

Vois, however, made a surprised face as if he hadn't noticed anything, and,

"So, you've willingly revealed yourself,"

He said.

And he became aware of the window behind him. He started simulating a plan to escape from here inside his head.

During that time, the man placed his hand on his chest, and bowing his head slightly,

"I am a messenger hailing from the Roland Empire, known as Miran Froaude. Pleased to make your acquaintance,"

Though he said that, this man called Froaude didn't give off the feeling that he was pleased to make his acquaintance, as Vois knew the instant he saw his demon-like face.

That was why, while smiling, Vois took a step back.

Froaude, looking at his feet, laughed again.

"There's no need to be afraid. It'll only hurt for a moment. No, not even for an instant—you likely won't feel any pain."

While saying such things, he took a necklace out of his pocket.

It was a **Rhule Fragmei** that would absorb the surrounding light and unleash explosive, destructive power.

Demonic Beast Destroyer [Ellearms].

Vois scowled at that. Though he possessed a **Rhule Fragmei** that held the power to render **Ellearms** null, in order to negate **Ellearms**, it was necessary to take down the film dividing the room.

And naturally, if the film were removed, this Froaude man would attack with his shadow beasts.

Even if he negated **Ellearms**, he wouldn't be able to defend against an attack from Froaude.

However, if he didn't negate **Ellearms**, there would be an explosion right in the heart of the country, its destruction exceeding even that of a large-scale offensive spell. If that were to happen, then it would be likely that this country wouldn't be able to rebuild itself.

Vois scowled at that, and shouted.

"If you use that here, then my subordinates within Roland will do the sa..."

He began, but Froaude laughed.

"You will die here. And my lineage will be known to no one. Now, let's end this already. Please resign yourself to your death,"

He said, moving to toss the necklace.

Vois made his decision to deal with it. From his pocket, he took out the **Divine Parasite Bugs** [Euloss Elma], devoted to devouring the light of the **Ellearms**.

And like that, turning on his heel,

"Harmit! Exit from the window! Provide back up!"

He called.

And he began enacting his plan from outside the room window.

However, then, Froaude said,

"Now, putting aside that joke..."

Suddenly, saying that, he put the necklace back in his pocket.

"....."

Vois, with a foot on the window, looked over his shoulder.

And narrowing his eyes at Froaude,

"... Don't you think that was a rather poor joke?"

Froaude smiled, and,

"Compared to what your spies, who you were able to send to Roland, did?"

He said such things.

Incidentally, the duty of the spies that Vois sent to Roland was to set fire to their provisions, blow up their armoury, etc.—things one couldn't really speak well of.

Rather, there was also the matter of unleashing a **Ellearms** at the Roland palace like the one that Froaude had almost activated.

But, even on top of not suffering any damage at all, the dispatched spies also—

"None of them came back, did they?"

Vois said, to which Froaude nodded.

"Because I killed them."

"You admitted it so easily, huh?"

"But you are the same, are you not?"

"Well, perhaps,"

Vois said, removing his foot from the window. Then, turning around, he pointed at Froaude and spoke.

"Or rather, if it were me in your position just now, I'd be attacking with **Ellearms**."

"Haha. But you're of a worse nature than me."

"That's right, isn't it? Well, though I'm always hoping that I have a worse nature than anybody else... Otherwise, an adorable child like me would've been immediately attacked all *'nooo'* and *'fufu'* and whatnot. That's also your true goal, isn't it?"

At such words,

"....."

However, Froaude didn't respond to that.

He looked around, and,

"However, seeing your frantic response just now, this country has yet to erect a barrier to negate **Ellearms**, hmm?"

He said.

Vois nodded at that.

"My, wouldn't that take about a month? But this country wasn't even established a month ago, if you recall,"

He said, though from the beginning, Vois had no intention of erecting a barrier.

Firstly, when it came to **Euloss Elma** that existed to negate **Ellearms** on its own, its numbers were few, so it was precious.

In terms of numbers, Vois had only six in his possession.

And once that **Rhule Fragmei** was used once, it couldn't be used again, so unless there was a place that had to be protected at all costs, he didn't want to use them.

And as for Sphelliyet here, Vois had plans for it to merely be a temporary establishment.

Though from now on, their army would, with Pia and co. attacking the other towns of the Geihlficlant Empire, be sequentially be migrating the acting capital city—

"....."

However, if they planned to return right after, it would be insane.

First, Ryner, whom they should be celebrating as their king, had been captured by the Remrus Empire.

Furthermore, an assassin from Roland had easily infiltrated the heart of their country.

The state of the world was continuing to spiral past Vois's expectations, and to that,

"... The me who thought about sleeping was a fool, huh?"

He muttered.

Froaude tilted his head to one side at that.

"What was that?"

Though he said that, Vois shrugged.

"No, nothing. Or rather, if you're not using **Ellearms**, then that means that you've come here with another goal in mind, doesn't it?"

As he asked that, Froaude nodded.

"Correct. I thought I would come and greet Ryner Lute-sama, who'd established this new country, and have him hear my opinions."

Vois laughed at those words.

Directing his eyes towards his subordinate whose upper body had been devoured and whose corpsed had collapsed onto the ground,

"... Greet him?"

Froaude also looked down and smiled.

And easily,

"Yes,"

He nodded.

Staring at Froaude with an astonished expression,

"Even though you nearly obliterated the country with **Ellearms**?"

"You would've defended against it, no? You possess **Euloss Elma**."

"That may be true, but..."

"And that we both possess **Rhule Fragmei** is what I confirmed just now. With this, the meaning behind your proposal for the peace treaty has finally been revealed. Using this sort of tool indiscriminately, no one will be left standing at the end—is that it?"

"....."

"And that fear just now, you felt it in your body as well. In that case, perhaps we can both walk the same path. If you throw away

your **Rhule Fragmei**, so will I. Now, please undo this barrier. I will use neither my Shadow Beasts nor **Ellearms**. Let us compromise. Undo the barrier, so that we may speak, face to face. For the sake of peace, as you said, hmm?"

He said such things.

He said cheerfully.

And in response, Vois looked at the knives that pierced the four corners of the room.

He looked at the **Rhule Fragmei** that was erecting a barrier in order to divide him and Froaude.

Even if he undid the barrier, this Froaude man wouldn't attack him.

The reason was, earlier, he demonstrated that he held a method to destroy the barrier.

If he unleashed **Ellearms** and dealt with the fleeing Vois, he was able to kill him, after all.

However, he didn't do that.

Furthermore, acknowledging the risks, he went as far as to reveal his home country.

In other words, this guy hadn't come here with the intention of killing Vois. Here, he'd come for some sort of negotiation, without intending on killing Vois.

So even if he undid the barrier, there wouldn't be a problem—that was how it should be, but.

"....."

Vois didn't undo the barrier.

No, he couldn't undo it.

He couldn't believe in this guy's words and mannerisms.

And Froaude laughed at that.

"Haha, cowering in fear, you won't undo the barrier? Even though you understand that I have no intention of killing you, you're

unable to undo the barrier."

"....."

"But I believe that to be an ordinary sentiment. Once a person obtains such a weapon, they are unable to discard it. If you discard it, then what to do if the other fellow discards his, if he outwits you, if he attacks you? Suspicion leads to more suspicion; as long as that is clear, then in the end, people won't discard their weapons. And in that case..."

Staring at Vois, he laughed, with the dark expression of a demon's.

"Ha, haha, in that case, what does that say about you, who is unable to undo the barrier, who won't discard his weapons? That ban on using the dangerous **Rhule Fragmei**? A peace treaty? How laughable. Don't you think that raising your seized weapons above your head while crying out for peace is rather amusing?"

To the question, however, Vois didn't think it was particularly amusing.

After all, he'd known from the beginning that it was like that.

Being born into this world as a descendant of a swindler family, about the weakness of a person's heart, about how to take advantange of a person's weakness, about how to destroy a person's heart—from the time he'd been born, he'd always been studying about those things.

That was why, cheerfully smiling, Vois spoke.

"The world shall decide whether it's amusing or not, Froaude-san. If everyone supports that opinion that I've happily put forth, then it will become reality. Raising my seized weapons above my head while crying out for peace is amusing? Haha, please don't laugh about that. This is about human lives, isn't it?"

He said, to which Froaude easily nodded.

"Yes, that's correct."

"In that case, what exactly did you come here to do? I have no interest in that sort of dull, immature speech."

Froaude smiled at that. Then, taking a step back, he exited into the

corridor.

The corridor was dyed in blood.

It was likely the blood of Vois's subordinates. There should have been seven guards of Vois's outside the room.

But no one had come to help. There were no indications of reinforcements.

In that case, everyone had presumably been killed.

And Froaude spoke. After directing his eyes towards the corridor once, he again looked at Vois, and,

"No, of course the speech just now wasn't for your benefit, Vois Fiurelle. I said it, did I not? That I've come to greet him. I came to have the one who established the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, the Demon King Ryner Lute-sama, listen to my opinions—though I thought I would come to have him listen to the words of our king, Sion Astal, it seems that it's rather difficult to find Ryner-san—"

He said, and at that point, Vois finally understood what his aim was.

This guy, like Remrus, had come to take Ryner away.

Though his method was different, his way would've been effective. Ryner was someone who would've easily been influenced by the view that Froaude presented just now.

And that was if those were the words of Sion Astal.

Furthermore, if Sion Astal, whom Ryner was seeking to save, had said such things, there was a decent chance that Ryner would've left this place.

Thus, right now, it might actually be a good thing that Ryner had been captured.

In his absence right now, if Vois could tell this guy that they had no intention of meeting with a messenger from Roland, then the significant behind the fact that Ryner wasn't here right now might also emerge somewhat, Vois thought.

"... Well, I'd like to convey that and pull it off, but..."

He muttered quietly.

Then, putting on airs as if he weren't affected by this disturbance, he puffed out his chest with a smile, and was about to say that Ryner wasn't there.

But then,

"Your Excellency,"

A voice rang from the corridor.

It was likely the voice of a subordinate that Froaude had brought along.

Though Vois couldn't see them from where he was, Froaude spoke to them.

"As I expected, Ryner-san isn't there?"

"Yes. Instead, Vois Fiurelle's subordinate was investigating Ryner Lute's room. After torturing them, I was told that it seemed that Ryner Lute had suddenly disappeared from this country this morning."

At hearing that report, Vois wanted to clutch his head.

At the same time, a smile broke out across Froaude's face.

Then looking over at Vois,

"Suddenly disappeared? And Vois-san, you are unaware of his whereabouts?"

Vois's thoughts began whirling at that. They turned wildly. That this information had been leaked was bad.

That Ryner's absence had been leaked was bad.

But Froaude stared at him with an intrigued face, and,

"... This has become an interesting situation, hasn't it? Even though you and Ryner Lute had managed to dig a ditch until now, it seems that the time for you has already come. Everything is over for you. With this, I have no need for such antics."

While saying that, Froaude took a step back.

Froaude was smiling.

Cheerfully smiling.

It was only natural.

Right now, if the information that Ryner was missing was revealed to the outside world, this country would easily come to an end.

Vois's plan that he'd laid out and frantically built up would crumble in an instant.

That was why Vois took out a different **Rhule Fragmei** from his pocket.

It was the same one that Froaude had taken out earlier.

Ellearms.

It was a **Rhule Fragmei** that no one would dare to use right in the middle of a city like this.

If he were to use it here, it held enough power to wipe out half the city.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to kill Froaude for certain here.

If Ryner's absence were to be revealed to the outside, then this place would be—

However, at that,

"Though I'd rather not, I also possess the **Rhule Fragmei** for negating that, you realize?"

While saying that, Froaude took another step back.

Then he gave orders to his subordinate.

"Leave. And tell this to the world. Right now, in the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, Ryner Lute—no, the Demon King isn't there —"

"Understood."

"But be cautious. It's likely that Sphelliyet will do everything it can to kill us. Remain alive, and we'll meet again in Roland. Now,

please go."

Saying that, Froaude swung his finger. Again, a shadow beast stretched from his shadow and was formed. And leaving behind that beast there,

"Now, Vois Fiurelle-sama, I bid you farewell,"

He said, before he began running into the corridor.

His figure eventually disappeared.

And at that,

"Damn it,"

Vois groaned, staring at the shadow beast that appeared to be keeping an eye on him.

Then inside his head, he began thinking of a way to pursue Froaude.

Following after him was simple.

He'd jump out the window behind him and call for help.

Though the **Rhule Fragmei** that Froaude held was a nuisance, the only place that was in ownership of **Rhule Fragmei** outside of this building was the elite force.

That was why it was possible to capture Froaude as well.

But.

"....."

Just then, Harmit spoke in a strained voice.

"Vois-sama, your instructions,"

She said.

But Vois didn't move. Instead, his thoughts continued to whirl.

He'd already seen Froaude's face. His height had also been confirmed. That was why the possibility that they could chase and capture him existed.

But what about Froaude's subordinate?

He didn't know anything about the other people.

And if even one person escaped, then this battle would be lost.

The news of Ryner's absence would most definitely be revealed to the outside.

That was why Vois kept thinking, searching for the most ideal plan.

A way such that no one would escape.

A way such that, without a doubt, no one would escape.

And he ordered his subordinate.

"Harmit."

"Yes?"

"Gather all of our ally soldiers behind this building within twenty minutes. And if it takes over twenty minutes, unleash seven **Ellearms** from here towards the south."

"Wha—!? W-With that, the district..."

"We're casting the district away."

"The soldiers also won't be able to move within twenty..."

"Then hurry. Don't be careless. What I think is necessary, when I think it's necessary, is to be implemented. If you move too slowly, you'll also be cast away."

Harmit's expression changed at those words. It bent with sadness for a moment, before it immediately tightened. And running towards the window, she moved to go outside.

And to her back, further orders were given.

"Just one shot of **Ellearms** should be negated. Froaude will be there. Squad #13 will pursue him. Apprehending him isn't necessary. Without fail, kill him—tell them that. Following that, Public Relations Squad #1, prepare to spread the news that Roland has violated the peace treaty. The disaster that will occur here was caused by Roland. Tell the world that people from Roland used

Rhule Fragmei from within the cities of other countries."

While nodding at that, Harmit leapt out the window.

"....."

He looked again at the corridor where Froaude no longer was, and,

"... Ah~, good grief, what is this? I don't particularly care over people's deaths either, though, right?"

He said such a thing.

And he let out a quiet sigh.

Then he slowly inhaled.

From here, tens of thousands—no, hundreds of thousands lives would be stolen. He began preparing for that impact.

Then turning towards the shadow beast that was glaring at him utterly as if watching over him, beyond the barrier in front of him,

"Your master is quite gloomy, isn't he? My, he has a face like he's always thinking dark thoughts. What do you think? You must also be fed up with your master, right?"

Though he said such things, the shadow beast didn't make any indication that it understood his words.

But Vois continued.

He continued talking to the shadow beast that had no will of its own.

"Incidentally, I wonder if what I tell this beast is passed onto the owner? Otherwise, as it continues to follow its previous orders, is it a stand-alone relic? Well, though I don't know which one it is, if there's any chance that you can hear me, Froaude-san—prepare yourself. After all, you won't be able to escape. The punishment for smiling so arrogantly at me will immediately..."

While saying that, he again took out a necklace from his pocket.

Called **Ellearms**, with a level of power that one wouldn't think people should wield, bringing forth brutal destruction—he took it out.

And in an instant.

In just about only an instant, he recalled Froaude's words.

Speaking so arrogantly of humans, he recalled Froaude's words.

Froaude had said this.

Because humans were horribly weak, they were too afraid to let go of the weapons that they'd obtained.

And regarding that, Vois stared at the necklace that he was grasping.

Staring at the weapon that would again steal tens of thousands of lives,

"... Ah~, I really am human, huh?"

He muttered quietly with emotion.

Chapter 3 - Remrus Empire

To go back in time a bit.

The location is the capital of the Remrus Empire—Echran.

The town was filled with life.

In the noisy shopping town, it was overflowing with crowds of people.

Well-maintained, within the streets—no, in the heart of numerous churches within the country, as if built in a circle, the people were gathering at the churches due to it being the weekend, to give praise to the king of the country.

And that,

"... As expected of the greatest superpower within the central continent. But when it comes to countries that seize their people through religion, it's the first time I've seen a country flourish to this extent,"

Luke Stokkart muttered, gazing at the streets.

Still twenty-five, twenty-six, he had long, pure white hair and an eternally smiling, calm face.

Inconspicuously, he inspected the vegetables a stall, while looking around and confirming his surroundings, to which,

"Hey, mister, if you're not gonna buy anything, then you're standing in the way, so would you move?"

The shopkeeper said.

In response, Luke put on a frantic appearance, and said,

"Ah, I apologize, I apologize. That the street is so full of people is something that surprised me."

At that, the shopkeeper looked his way. Then, noticing the traveling garb that Luke was wearing,

"Oh, are you a traveler?"

He nodded at the question.

"I'm from the neighbouring country of Hoful and came to find some work away from home... Ah, have you heard of the country of Hoful?"

The shopkeeper shook her head.

"Nope. But it's one of those, isn't it? A vassal country of this Remrus Empire?"

At those words, Luke smiled sweetly and corrected her.

"No. It's one of its allies."

"Ah, did I upset you?"

"No, no, though it's officially an ally country, the truth is that it is dependent on this country... but at any rate, it's not doing very well, so I was hoping to find work outside."

While giving out one lie after another, he picked up a vegetable with yellow leaves.

It wasn't a vegetable found in Roland—no, though it was possibly a fruit—though furthermore he didn't know of how one would cook this, he held it anyway, and,

"As I need to be frugal with my money, I need to properly cook for myself,"

He said such a thing.

The shopkeeper nodded in admiration with a *right, right*, and said,

"Mister, even though you're still young, you've got a great mindset, don't you?"

"Well, though you say that, today's the first time I've thought about cooking."

"Oh dear, that's bad."

"Isn't it? In this city, I'll be making my first real attempt,"

He said, making an uneasy expression, before looking around again.

The shopkeeper spoke.

"It'll be all right. After all, this town is full of friendly people, y'know? If it comes down to it, you can count on the church. Ah, have you already been to the church? If you end up living in this town, you must meet with the advisors."

Luke nodded at such words.

"The merchant owner who agreed to give me some work said that as well. I'll meet with them tomorrow."

"I see, I see. That's good. If you meet properly with the advisors, then it'll be all right for you to live in this town. You'll live a happy life here,"

The shopkeeper said.

Luke smiled at that and nodded.

"Then, do you have any cheap vegetables today?"

He asked.

The shopkeeper laughed and said,

"It's fine, for today only, I'll do you a service. Pick any ones you like."

Even if she said that, it wasn't like he knew how to cook any of the vegetables, but at any rate, Luke picked out a few fruit-like objects, and,

"Then, I'll take advantage of your generous offer, so is it fine even if I take these?"

"What's this? It's fine if you don't hold back and take more, y'know?"

"No, no, if I took so much that I couldn't finish them, since that'd be an inexcusable waste. If I don't have enough, I can always come back."

"Hey, hey, the next ones aren't free, you realize?"

"Aha."

"Geez, you're just such a likable guy, huh? Well, see you later, then."

"Yes, thank you very much. Then, with this."

"Yes, yes, thank you for your patronage~"

The shopkeeper said.

At that, Luke bowed his head and left the stall.

The shopping town unsurprisingly brimming with people, everyone had bright faces.

A man and a woman were getting married in one place apparently, a stall elsewhere was selling stylish clothing, a grandchild was being born elsewhere—he overheard that kind of thing.

And the men, women, elderly, and children all laughed.

They laughed with cheerful faces from the bottom of their hearts.

Even though, right now, with this country in the middle of a war with Roland, their brethren continued to drop like flies each day.

Even though, as this country had chosen to conscript its soldiers, their family, children, and neighbours were being sent out to war each day and dying, they laughed peacefully.

Incidentally, based on Luke's investigation, right now, the greengrocer lady that Luke had spoken no longer had any family left, apparently.

Her two sons and husband had been conscripted and were currently participating in the war.

No, they likely weren't in this world anymore.

"....."

Luke looked over his shoulder.

There, his eyes met the shopkeeper's.

The shopkeeper smiled and waved a hand at him.

Luke waved back, and,

"As I thought, this is clearly..."

He muttered.

Then at the town's—gazing at the cheerful appearances of the people here, as everyone was so bright that it was unnerving,

"... This is clearly brainwashing magic at work here,"

He said.

Then he looked up at the church at the end of the town.

The church was considerably large, in the shape of a steeple. No matter where one was in the country, they would be able to see that steeple.

And anyone who visited this country absolutely had to visit the church and speak with the advisors, as Luke had been told, though,

"... Now then, it's the church that's casting the brainwashing magic, isn't it?"

Luke considered such a thing.

"Could a large-scale brainwashing magic that covers the entire country exist?"

While saying that, he hit his own head, and then touched his chest. Confirming his pulse with his fingertip, he counted to make sure it was within range of his expectations.

At the very least, right now, it didn't appear that any sort of unique magic had been used on him. There was nothing strange about his mental condition.

In other words,

"As I thought, the church is suspicious, hmm?"

He said while walking.

The town unsurprisingly filled with life, for some reason, things felt

slightly happier there.

Leaving the shopping town, he entered an inn that was somewhat in a back alley.

Unsurprisingly, the inn's landlord was also upbeat.

Looking at him.

"Will you be staying the night?"

Luke nodded at those words.

"Do you have a room available for two nights?"

"We do. You fine with paying in advance, though?"

"That's fine."

Luke said, taking out the currency being used in the Remrus Empire from his pocket.

While taking that, the landlord stared at him, and,

"You a traveler?"

Luke nodded at the question.

"From the country of Hoful..."

"Ah~, working away from home, I see. Since this place is cheap, it's a great place to stay for a kid working away from home until they find a home,"

The landlord said such a thing.

Luke smiled at that, and said,

"It seems so. Looking at other places' pricing, I was also surprised."

The landlord nodded with a *right, right*.

"Well, since it's in a back alley, we don't get a lot of customers, so we gotta keep the price low like this. Even if that weren't the case, this country doesn't get a lot of travelers."

"Hoh."

"But it's a great place to live. Then, will you be looking for a place to work tomorrow?"

"That's the intention, but I'm not sure where a good place would be?"

At the question, the landlord spoke.

"If that's the case, you should discuss it with the advisors. Ah, if you don't know about 'em, in the event that you stay here for ten days or more..."

There, Luke interrupted him and spoke.

"I must tell the advisors. That's how it is, correct? I know."

"Oh, then that's good. Then, have you already met with the advisors?"

Luke shrugged at that, and,

"No, I just arrived, so... I was thinking about doing it tomorrow,"

He said.

However, that was a lie.

It had already been half a month after he entered the Remrus Empire as a spy.

He'd been investigating first the situation of the town, information on the people living there, the territory, how the country was managed.

And as he moved from town to town, he'd already sent many reports to Roland on how this country's organization and the shroud covering it were abnormal.

Though he had yet to visit the church—no, though he'd tried sneaking into it, the church's security was considerably strict, and on top of that, it seemed that from all directions, there was some kind of magic being used to the manipulate the nerves of the people here, and so he had to prepare carefully.

But those preparations had been arranged for tomorrow—no, he planned to sneak in this night.

Staring at him, the landlord spoke.

"In any case, meet with the advisors as soon as possible, all right? If you receive the advisors' guidance, there won't be any problems."

Luke nodded at that.

"When I left my homeland, I was told by my fellow travelers working away from home to go and see the church at the very beginning."

"That's right, that's right. That's a relief,"

The landlord said, laughing.

Luke also smiled at that, and received the key to the room.

"It's the innermost room on the second floor."

"Thank you very much."

Giving his thanks to the landlord, he headed towards his room. While affirming the structure of the inn, he arrived at his room.

The room wasn't locked.

Opening the door that seemed like it'd be easy to break by kicking it open, he entered the room.

It was a small room with a desk, a closet, and a bed.

But he didn't especially care about the furniture of the room.

He looked towards the window. He checked to see whether he could escape from the window.

Outside the window, it was connected to a narrow alleyway.

It was an alleyway narrow enough that he could jump to the neighbouring building.

But, well,

"... Seems like I can escape, hmm?"

He said, nodding as he placed his belongings on the bed.

Then he also sat down on the bed.

Though the window was open, due to how close the distance between it and the neighbouring building was, not much light entered the room.

As there was no lamp, even though it was still around evening, it was dark within the room.

Amidst that darkness,

"....."

He waited for time to pass.

The day fell.

It became darker inside the room.

But he still didn't move.

Because tonight, people weren't sleeping. That was why he turned on the lamp in his room. Then he took out the vegetables he bought earlier and placed them on the desk.

"... Afterwards, I'll have to borrow the kitchen and try cooking with these,"

He muttered such a thing.

Following that, he opened the knapsack that carried the rest of his belongings. Supplied with after he entered the capital of the Remrus Empire—Echran, there was a combat uniform that was easy to move in and several knives. The combat uniform was that of the Remrus Empire's soldier. Furthermore, there was also a rough map of the largest church in Echran, the capital of the Remrus Empire.

Hiding that underneath the bed, he again sat on top of the bed.

He looked outside the window where it was pitch black, and,

"....."

Unsurprisingly, he didn't move.

He would move when it was past midnight.

At that,

"... Would it be fine to sleep for a bit?"

He said, lying down on the bed and closing his eyes.

However, sleep didn't come.

Somehow, it seemed that his nerves were too irritable, and so he couldn't fall asleep.

Regarding that, Luke opened his eyes faintly, and,

"....."

However, as expected, he said nothing.

Instead, he stared at the ceiling above him.

He stared at the plain, empty ceiling of the inn.

There was nothing in the room.

There was nothing in the room.

But.

"....."

But, in this air that was filled with no gaps in it, there were monsters that he couldn't see with his eyes.

Though they couldn't be seen by humans, completely filling the air, monsters wriggled around.

For example, the monsters known as **Goddesses**.

The monster known as the **Hero**.

The monster known as the **Demon**.

The monsters known as **Priests**.

Utterly sneering at the efforts of humans, toying with a person's fate, with everything dancing about in the palms of their hands.

He held his hand out towards that in the air that couldn't be seen, and,

"... No, well, though I've always been vaguely aware,"

He muttered.

Correct.

Regarding that, he'd already realized it since he was a child.

That some kind of special power, structure was operating in the world—it was influencing everything, wasn't it?

He'd always thought that sort of thing.

Rather than some obscure feeling, as he'd continued to analyze the reality of things as it accumulated, he'd reached that conclusion before he knew it.

For example, the Roland Empire—even if one just looked at the existence of such a country, that was something that one would understand.

There was something clearly abnormal about that country.

Like the state of this Remrus Empire, enough that one couldn't be surprised, that place was also a strange country.

For starters, the nobles' tyranny and corruption went on for so long, and yet continued to hold on to overwhelming military power in the southern continent; it was that sort of reality.

The discontent with the king, who was unanimously nothing but a misgovernment, never turned into action—even if it did, that reformation would never succeed; it was that sort of reality.

And if one were to peruse through the history books of that country, it seemed that it had maintained that state for over hundreds of years.

That recently, Sion Astal had created a revolution, changing the country to the point where it was as if it'd been reborn—though that sort of thing had happened, even that revolution, in truth, was trifling.

After all, Sion was also someone who carried the blood of the royal family.

That meant even now, the country was being ruled by someone of

the same blood.

On top of that, for such an abnormally long time as hundreds of years, it'd been ruled by people of the same blood.

Naturally, there'd been several revolutions.

It'd always been a terrible country. Amidst the oppressed people, there'd been competent ones, as well as those who gathered allies and tried to start a revolution.

But each and every time, it ended in failure. For hundreds of years, there'd been countless revolutions, and all of them ended in failure.

And the father of Luke's superior Rahel Miller was also a revolutionary.

Likely a middle-aged man, he was a revolutionary who probably possessed greater forces.

It was a revolution that should have succeeded, no matter what. Miller's father was meticulous and reserved his powers for years and months, even getting the primary nobles on his side.

But in the end, they failed.

At the end of it all, it was nothing but tragedy.

Why it failed, no one knew.

Back when Luke first met Rahel Miller, he'd done considerable investigation on the details of what the man's father did, but even then, he couldn't figure out why the revolution had been destroyed.

Even though Miller's father had possessed that degree of power at the time.

And then, there had been something strange about the country.

Everyone thought the country was mad.

Everyone thought the country had to change.

But it didn't change.

Never thinking that something abnormal, unseen by the human eye was controlling matters, history advanced forward.

That was why Miller had set Sion up as their leader.

If, somehow, there's some strange curse or requirements needed for the sake of changing this country, let's start a revolution that fulfills those requirements, and so it wasn't that Sion Astal was especially needed for the revolution, but they set up someone who was still young and carried the blood of the royal family as leader.

And the result was that the revolution succeeded.

No, the fact that Sion became king meant that there might be some problems with calling it a revolution, but Miller had done it.

But ultimately, that country now, from long ago, continued to be ruled by someone who carried the blood of the king.

And the reason for that was because of the several existences in this world.

Gods—though, in the Roland Empire that had no religion, the existence of such things couldn't be felt, that some kind of large, inhuman existence was manipulating the reason of the world was something that Luke had always suspected.

And as if to make doubly sure of that,

"....."

Before him, Lieral Lieutolu, a human who had ceased to be a person, appeared.

Luke recalled that moment.

The moment when, appearing before him, Lieral proposed to have a negotation with him.

About the existences of the **Hero** and the **Goddesses** and the **Priests** who'd created them.

Recalling the proposal of discussing how they, as humans, were to oppose such monsters...

"....."

There, he stopped thinking.

And he looked outside the window.

In this inn, located in an alleyway completely as if it were being hidden, there was little noise.

But looking towards that darkness,

"... My, my, it looks like a guest has come,"

Luke muttered.

Then faintly opening his eyes,

"However, I shouldn't be acquainted with anyone in this country,"

He said, rising.

He looked outside, where the supposed acquaintance was approaching.

Of course, though he'd noticed the presence of the other party, he couldn't see their manner.

With closed ventilation, he moved to close the window, and while putting on that sort of act, he put his hand on the window.

Then he gazed outside.

As for what he could see from the window, there was no hidden spots in a narrow place like this and so he had a view of everything,

"....."

There was nobody else in the alleyway.

Even though he felt someone's presence, he couldn't see anything.

In spite of that, that presence was steadily approaching.

Feeling something approach the second-storey window where Luke was—

"It seems that the ventilation will be enough any moment now,"

Luke said, shutting the window.

Like that, he took a step back.

Then he stared at the window.

If something, by any chance, were approaching.

And if they were to smash through the window, he'd be able to deal with them.

If they were to strike the window with that sort of tangibility, he'd be able to fight with them.

If they were using some kind of spell in this country such that their figure couldn't be seen, or if they possessed a **Rhule Fragmei** with that kind of ability.

Either way, if the opponent were an ordinary human, then there were means of dealing with them.

But,

"... But here is a country ruled by a monster of some unknown nature called **God**, isn't it?"

He muttered in a slightly troubled voice.

During that time, the presence steadily approached.

That was why he took another step back, concentrating on the window.

And taking the Latsel Thread out of his pocket, he unleashed it around him. Extending indefinitely, unable to be cut, this thread that possessed those abilities was cast from the front of the window frame as if being suspended.

If the other party was tangible, this thread would also be effective.

Confining the enemy with the thread, he set up an attack in that space...

But then,

"Ah, this is bad,"

Luke groaned.

As expected, the presence was approaching.

No, already, it wasn't simply a presence, but rather one could call it killing intent that was approaching before Luke's eyes.

Easily cast from the window, the Latsel Thread wasn't coming into contact with anything at all, as "that" which couldn't be seen was getting closer to Luke inside his room.

"Damn it, as I thought, it's an intangible enemy?"

Luke said, taking another step back as he opened the room door.

And he fled outside.

The presence chasing from behind him, Luke didn't look back and barged into the neighbouring room on the second floor.

Kicking through the window, he exited to the outside.

As he kicked the opposite building's wall, he dropped into the alleyway and began running.

Unsurprisingly, the presence continued to chase him from behind.

No, the presence was no longer from behind.

It felt as if it were bursting out from all around him in every place.

That killing intent—no, that malice began to surround Luke.

"... This is my bad, hmm? Having my whereabouts discovered so easily by the enemy disqualifies me as a spy, doesn't it? Captain Milk will be angry about this."

While muttering such things, he ran.

He turned through numerous alleyways.

To escape without trouble, as much as possible, as much as possible, he chose the paths without signs of people and so pressed forward.

However, each time, the presence grew.

As much as he ran, the surrounding presence grew.

Even so, he, without hesitating, ran through the streets.

The reason was that, with the location of the presence that he felt combined with the map of the streets that was forming inside his head, he'd noticed a path through which he could properly escape.

The presence's movements weren't especially quick.

Furthermore, the way that the presence was growing in itself seemed to be systematic, and if so,

"I should be able to es..."

But then,

"My mistake,"

He groaned, frowning.

Because he just noticed it.

Because he just noticed that, in the map that spread across his mind, the destination to which he was running right now was the church.

It seemed that the presence chasing him from behind was delivering Luke personally to the church.

At that, Luke stopped running, and,

"Why did I make this sort of error?"

He said in a tone as if he were disgusted with himself.

Unsurprisingly, the presence approached.

Many, many unseen presences approached.

It was likely no longer possible to escape. Moreover, aside from the path to the church, the presence was overflowing from every place.

"This truly is my bad,"

He muttered.

"No, well, it seems as if I'm being guided by some hand to go to the church, though. At any rate, tonight, I've been given permission to intrude,"

He muttered.

"But to go out of their way to have me see the church, that means that even if I were captured by this presence, they're unable to

brainwash me, aren't they? It seems that I can consider that possibility. No, though I likely can't indulge this sort of wishful thinking... Well, like this, there's a decent chance that I'll be ambushed there..."

Just then, the presence caught up with Luke.

As if completely wrapping around his mind, something like a clear lump of malice swooped down.

< < Don't resist. > >

Suddenly, a voice echoed.

Inside his head, as if directly descending upon him, was a voice.

Luke narrowed his eyes at that, and,

"Ah~, as I thought, it's brainwashing magic...?"

He muttered.

However, ignoring that, the voice continued to resound.

< < Go to the church. There, you'll find salvation. > >

At the same time as the voice spoke, Luke's body began to move on its own.

Even though he gave them no such orders, both of his hands and feet moved on their own and began to walk.

"....."

He looked down at his own body. And regarding his hands and legs that were moving on their own, he gave a separate command.

Don't react to any signals from the brain, he ordered.

With that, his body's movements ceased. No, if he didn't continue to give out that order, his body would begin moving again, but,

"This level of brainwashing magic is no different from what a

human would use, and so I can deal with it... but they're certainly earnest about having me go to the church, aren't they?"

Luke said.

Regarding those words, there was a response. But rather than the voice descending in his mind, it was a human's voice that responded.

Diagonal from Luke, from inside a private home,

"Considering your standing as a human, you're being *quite* stubborn, huh?"

A man's voice spoke.

As Luke looked towards the source, a lone man stepped out of the house.

It was a middle-aged man with a beard.

That man looked his way, and,

"Who are you? Why isn't the brainwashing magic working?"

He said such a thing.

Luke was about to answer, but then, from behind him,

"Well, it doesn't matter who you are. After all, in the end, you'll become another one of my devotees... and at our own leisure, we'll investigate your brain,"

A woman's voice sounded out, as Luke turned around.

There, a street stall lady was staring at him. Somehow, it appeared at the words just now were this woman's.

Furthermore, a child walking to his side looked at him, and said,

"Then, shall we end this already?"

And then,

"Let's punish the heretic,"

The mother leading the child said.

And she laughed.

The mother laughed.

"Ahahahahahahahaha."

The child laughed.

"Ahahahahahahahaha."

The middle-aged man from the house laughed.

"Ahahahahahahahaha."

And by then, as if the entire population of the street had gathered there, there were hundreds of people surrounding him, laughing madly. Laughing. Laughing.

And,

< < Capture him. > >

At the same time that the voice descended, those hundreds of people rushed in at once.

Looking around at that,

"How remarkable..."

Luke said in a voice of admiration.

"Rather than brainwashing to have them pledge loyalty, it's actually manipulating the entire country...? Certainly, this by far surpasses the level of magic that a human could use..."

While saying that, he released the Latsel Thread towards a building wall.

The thread twined around part of the wall's plumbing.

Pulling on the thread, he raised his body into the air, but,

< < Don't move. > >

The voice descended.

His body reacted to that. His brain, in response to the voice, was about to stop moving, to which,

"... Don't listen to the voice. Move your arm,"

Luke ordered his body, in an attempt to defy the brainwashing magic cast by that voice.

Then, his arm that had begun to lose its strength again hardened its will. Pulling on the thread like that, he kicked the ground and jumped.

And leaping away from the flock of people who'd rushed at him, he moved up the four-storey building. Climbing further up, he moved onto the roof.

During that time, more people gathered. Already, hundreds of people were glaring at Luke, and,

"Capture him!"

"Capture him!"

While chanting that, they filled up the ground, and one by one, they started climbing up after him.

Luke looked down at that.

He stared at the crowd that had gathered. Then again, he formed a map inside his head.

He thought about whether or not he could escape from the roof, and things like that.

But it was an obvious matter.

"... If everyone in this town is my enemy, then escape truly is impossible, isn't it?"

He said in a troubled voice.

No matter which route he escaped from, he would undoubtedly be caught. After all, there were hundreds of thousands of people in this town.

He wouldn't be able to disorient all of the eyes on him and flee, and even if he did somehow find a way to leave this town, he would still be in Remrus Empire territory.

Somewhere, along the way, he'd definitely be caught.

At any rate,

"... There's an almighty god watching from the sky, isn't there?"

He said, looking up at the sky, but that almighty god was no longer responding.

In its stead, the humans that had been brainwashed by that god had reached where Luke was.

And they grabbed his arm.

They grabbed his legs.

They pinned his body to the ground.

Like that, they raised their fists and hit him with all their strength.

"Gah—"

He groaned.

Then, at that, again a voice descended from the sky.

< < Ah, sor~ry, that didn't knock you out very well... Nooo, manipulating so many humans in itself is difficult, you know. The next one should do the trick. > >

As it said such a thing, Luke again looked up at the night sky.

Looking up at the cloudless, pretty sky full of stars,

"... Ha, you're quite a casual god, aren't you?"

He said, as again a fist rained down on him.

"Guh—"

At that, Luke felt his consciousness escape for a moment.

But he wasn't able to fall unconscious.

Again the voice spoke.

< < Ahahahahaha, another failure. If you're accidentally killed by any chance, then sorry about that. > >

It said, as again fists swung down at him.

Fists swung down at him.

Again, and again, and again, fists swung down at him.

And gradually, his consciousness began to fade.

The landscape distorting, steadily, steadily, he felt himself sink into darkness.

As darkness filled his entire line of sight, he felt himself lose consciousness and be pulled into a dream.

And in that dream, he continued his recollection from back then, atop the inn bed.

That was the memory of when, in the Roland Empire, Lieral Lieutolu had proposed a deal to him.

A memory of when he'd made a deal with the human who'd stopped being human.

That, Luke remembered.

♦

It'd already been several months since he made the deal with Lieral Lieutolu.

It was in the place where the nobles of the Roland Empire dwelled.

Having lost its head due to Miran Froaude's purge, it was the room

of a noble's mansion that was now abandoned—

"....."

With the Latsel thread, Luke had cut off Duke Lieral Lieutolu's head.

Furthermore, in one part of his chest, he'd stabbed him with a knife coated in poison.

However, in spite of that, Lieral didn't die.

As if he found the situation funny, Lieral's body shrugged, before picking up his head and placing it back on.

However, then, beneath Lieral's feet, the trap that had been placed there beforehand activated.

A magic circle glowed, and from within its center a ball of fire was formed, before exploding. Lieral's left leg was blown off. Furthermore, a trap surrounding Lieral exploded as if in a chain, setting his entire body on fire; however, in the center of the fire, Lieral spoke.

"... Wow, impressive, impressive. What's impressive, though, is that even though you know it's futile, you keep meticulously laying traps like this each and every time. How many times have you attacked me like this by now?"

To that, Luke replied,

"Eight times."

"I see. It's already reached that many? Don't you think you're being a little too stubborn?"

"The fact that you won't die is a problem."

"Eh, it's my fault? I hadn't realized,"

Lieral said, smiling cheerfully.

However, to that, Luke frowned with a troubled expression as he looked at him.

"The knife was of no use. The poison was of no use. The magic was of no use. Burning was of no use. Drowning was of no use—with all these tests, as one would expect, I'm getting worn out by this point."

At those words, again Lieral smiled.

"To try all that against me, you're a complete monster."

"I don't want to be told that by a genuine monster."

"No, no, I'm truly afraid of you. Anyhow, wherever I go, traps have been laid out. It seems that someone is trailing me...?"

To that kind of question, Luke replied,

"I was merely following your traces. Or rather, you've been testing me, haven't you? Even though you could've killed me in an instant, you've overlooked me each time, and furthermore, you've always left only enough traces for me to notice. But I've already grown tired of this farce, so would you tell me what your aim is?"

Lieral stared at him with a slightly surprised expression.

"My, my, have I been exposed?"

To those words, Luke spoke in a frustrated tone.

"I realized it from the beginning."

"No way～"

"Would you stop this farce already?"

Again, Lieral laughed, after which he nodded.

"Well, after seeing your true skill, I think it'll be fine to end this."

Staring at Lieral, Luke spoke.

"I'm glad to hear that. So, what are you after? Though you claimed that you weren't human, what use would you have for me, someone who barely surpasses an ordinary human at best?"

"No, I think that I can find quite a bit of use for you."

"What is it about me?"

"Aren't there plenty of things you want to ask me? If you have a sharp mind, you should have questions about this country."

At that, Luke made a thoughtful expression, before he spoke.

"I'd have to think about which questions to ask."

Lieral smiled.

"Ah, well, this country has many secrets, doesn't it? Then, I'd like to ask something in return. Do you like the current king?"

At that, Luke stared at Lieral and asked,

"Are you talking about Sion-san?"

"That's right."

"I like him?"

"Then, do you believe in him?"

To that question, Luke answered,

"No, I don't believe in anyone."

To that, Lieral grinned broadly and said,

"Then why do you serve Sion Astal?"

"Because isn't that the best thing to do in this situation?"

"Then, if Sion Astal were to be same as the past kings, if he were to become strange, what would you do?"

"Kill him."

"Said so easily, huh?"

"I will do what's necessary when it's necessary—if it were Miller-senpai, I believe he'd say that... Ah, if I recall correctly, you're acquainted with Miller-senpai, are you not?"

"Yeah. From quite a long time ago, though. The one who gave him

the clue to his success was me."

"Hmm. However, if you have such a good relationship, then why aren't you making a deal with Miller-senpai? He's far superior to me."

"I wonder. He has too much of a human heart, after all."

"And I'm not?"

Lieral looked at him with a cheerful expression and,

"Do you think you are?"

He said.

"Do you really have any humanity remaining? That white hair is from a military experiment, isn't it? With a magic circle embedded into your brain, you possess high intelligence. In return, you should've lost your emotions. "

"....."

"Your brain is no longer capable of producing complex emotions. You can't love others, you can't cry tears of sorrow. You can only observe the facts as they accumulates. You can only make judgment on what exists."

"....."

"Though earlier, when you made a tedious expression, when you made an irritated expression, you weren't truly feeling anything, were you? As your mind has been torn apart, without any true significance..."

However, then,

"... I know best about myself, without needing you to explain anything,"

Luke said.

Then pointing to his head,

"But it's not quite that I feel nothing. Certainly, through only the accumulation of facts, I cannot judge everything, but... with this accumulation, emotions can be produced. In that way, I'm capable

of considering which expression to create and which tone to speak in."

"But in the end, you don't feel anything, do you?"

"....."

"That's why I chose you. You're the same as me, a human who exists outside of the normal framework. And yet, you long to be human. You like Claugh Klom, don't you? You like Milk Callaud. Why is that? Because they possess what you don't. Because they possess the deep emotions that you don't... you stay close to them."

At those words, Luke stared at Lieral not with his typical calm expression, but one devoid of emotions, as he spoke.

"... Since when have you been observing me?"

Lieral gave forth an incredulous answer.

"Since about ten years ago, give or take."

"... That's my mistake. You've always been observing me to see if I could be of any use?"

"You seemed like you could come in handy, after all."

At those words, Luke looked around Lieral. He searched for some sort of means to kill them.

But as expected, there was nothing that he could use, and so Luke said in a fed up tone that he constructed,

"Would it be all right if we discussed one thing?"

Lieral replied,

"What is it?"

"Right now, I possess the intent to kill you."

"Heh."

"Moreover, the truth of the matter is that affection towards Captain Milk and Claugh does exist inside of me."

"Right."

"Don't you think that counts as emotion?"

To that question, Lieral easily nodded, and,

"That's what I think."

"And yet I don't have a human heart?"

To that, while smiling, Lieral spread out both arms and spoke.

"I, for the sake of my son—I sacrificed my wife and the world. In order to save my son, nothing else in this world mattered. Because of the love I have for my son, I no longer make proper judgments. But for you, it's different, isn't it? Claugh Klom and Milk Callaud—if it was necessary, you would easily kill them, isn't that right?"

"....."

"Even Rahel Miller isn't like that. He has a wife and child. Surely, for the sake of his family, he'd sell out the world. He's a sharp man, but to the very end, he's weak. No, that's why he's strong, to put it in another way. But at any rate, to the very end, humans will prioritize their love. Because they're weak. Because they're strong. That's how humans are, I believe."

"....."

"But you're not like that. Because you accept nothing but the truth. Because you don't have emotions, if you deem it necessary, you're able to move forward on the path you've chosen without hesitation."

"....."

"That's why I chose you. As you're someone who no longer possesses human emotions and yet who tries so hard to imitate humans, who yearns to be with humans, I wanted to make a deal with you—"

"....."

"Now, shall we end this long talk? More importantly, there are a few requests I'd like to ask of you..."

In response, Luke stared at Lieral and spoke.

"Is there any merit in listening to your requests?"

Nodding as if it were obvious, Lieral spoke.

"Of course. I'll tell you several things about the state of this country —no, the state of this world. Then, I'll tell you how to undo the brainwashing magic that's been cast on you."

At those words, Luke narrowed his eyes.

"Brainwashing magic?"

"Yeah. Well, since you're clever, I think you've probably noticed, but you're being brainwashed by Milk Callaud, you know?"

"....."

"No, because you're aware of that, you've been by Milk Callaud's side. Because you noticed that she was special. Because you noticed that she's been unconsciously releasing a deceptive magic to the humans surrounding her."

"....."

"That's why I said that you don't have emotions. Though you say that you possess affection towards Milk Callaud, you ultimately stayed by her side because it was necessary. Because you deemed her to be at the heart of this country, you stayed by her side..."

He began, but then, Luke said,

"Like I said, if it's an explanation about me..."

"There's no need?"

"Correct. Let's quickly move on with the deal,"

Luke said.

Then, again constructing a peaceful, smiling face,

"So, you'll tell me a means of undoing the brainwashing over me?"

At that, Lieral nodded.

"Yeah. But before that, it's necessary to talk about this world. It's necessary to talk about the monsters that created humans."

Then Lieral started talking about the existences of the **Hero**,

Goddesses, and the **Priests** who created them.

But right now, that wasn't important.

What was needed was what he heard back then: the means of undoing the brainwashing magic.

Inside his head.

Inside his heart.

The means of removing the curse deep inside of him.

That was what he remembered.

Because of the gods.

He remembered how to undo the curse placed there because of those monsters—

♦

"....."

Luke opened his eyes.

Though he didn't know how long he'd been unconscious, right now, the place that he was in was the center of a large room.

In that room, there was stand with countless beds, with several humans sleeping on top.

As it seemed that he was the only one who'd awakened, even with this many humans present, he couldn't hear their sleeping breath.

Though he tried to look around, it seemed that his body's movements were sluggish.

It was an unpleasant feeling as if he were trying to move through mud.

And in his head, a voice echoed.

It wasn't something that could be heard from outside.

From deep within his own mind, a voice echoed.

< < You are my entity, my body, my entity, my body. Blessed, here is blessed, be troubled by nothing anymore. Be troubled by nothing anymore. Instead, listen to my voice. The reason you were born, the meaning of your life is to devote yourself to God's voice. You are my entity, my body, my entity... > >

The voice continued to ring endlessly.

In that time, his body was heavy, heavy, as he could barely will himself to move.

However, in defiance, Luke lifted his hand. Rolling up his sleeve, he could see that part of the skin had been torn as if by nails.

From there, a needle came out. Concealed beneath the skin, an ordinary needle came out, and with that needle,

"... Hmm."

He stabbed the side of his head.

Piercing through the skin, he stabbed the joint of his skull.

Lieral said that that was the part that induced one to listen to **God**'s voice.

So that **Humans** would listen to them, the **Goddesses** created that part.

And there, he gouged out with the needle.

At that moment, the voice in his head easily vanished.

"... All right,"

Luke said, nodding.

Confirming that his body had been freed, he stood up.

And then he looked around.

He was in a large room with a high ceiling, and after confirming, the structure, he concluded that he was likely in the church.

Staring at the interior of the church,

"... Now then, I've succeeded in infiltrating as planned..."

However, just then, there was a voice.

Arising inside of his head was a voice.

Even though the brainwashing should've been undone, again inside his head, a voice echoed.

That voice—

< < Luke. > >

It called his name.

However, it was a separate voice, different from before.

A separate god's voice.

< < Luke Stokkart. > >

It called out.

It was a female's.

A sweet, pretty female voice.

Milk Callaud's voice.

That voice spoke.

< < Luke Stokkart. Stay with me. > >

That voice spoke.

< < Always stay with me. > >

As if it were sending a suggestion to him, it repeated that.

And to that,

"....."

Luke looked down at the needle that he held in his hand.

Then again, he remembered Lieral's words.

Lieral had said this.

*"With this, you'll be able to resist the **voice** of monsters—although, you won't be brainwashed only if the other party can't manage it. But if it's you... if it's your eternally calm self, then perhaps like me, you won't stray from your path. Perhaps, to escape the curse of the **Goddesses** and the **Hero**, you'll seek the correct path to amend this world..."*

He'd said that kind of thing.

To that,

"Why would a madman like you, in the end, depend on someone else?"

Luke had complained, to which Lieral had merely smiled sadly and disappeared.

And of that sad expression,

"....."

Luke was jealous.

Driven mad by love, rising to such levels, easily straying from the correct path, like any other human—he was jealous of Lieral Lieutolu.

Because he couldn't be like that.

Because, as he'd lost his emotions and his framework had already been disconnected from humanity, he couldn't be like that.

"....."

That was why Luke stared at the needle.

He stared at the needle he held in his hand.

If he used it, then making the voice echoing inside his head—Milk Callaud's voice—disappear would be simple.

He already knew how, if he pierced the proper part of his brain, to make that voice disappear.

He was being brainwashed.

He was being brainwashed by Milk Callaud.

And furthermore, he was aware of that.

From the moment they'd met, he'd been aware of that.

That was why he'd always been with her.

After all, she was special.

From here on, in the Roland Empire, she was a needed human—no, because of that fact.

That was why he'd acted alongside her.

If it was necessary to kill her—if it was necessary, he could cut her down.

One could say that he'd stayed with her only to make use of her.

He couldn't create emotions like affection or compassion. That part of his brain had been destroyed.

And moreover, he'd obtained the means of escaping Milk's curse.

< < Luke. Please stay with me. > >

He'd obtained the means of undoing her brainwashing.

< < Luke. > >

It was obvious that he should undo the brainwashing.

He should do what was necessary when it was necessary. Therefore, he should undo the brainwashing.

< < Luke. Please stay with me... > >

However, to Milk's voice, he smiled.

And he casually threw away the needle.

"... No, no, Lieral-san, I'm sorry to say that I'm still a human who possesses emotions,"

He cheerfully murmured.

And again, the voice in his head said,

< < Luke. > >

To that voice,

"... Ah~ yes, yes, Captain, please just wait a little longer,"

He said in a cheerful voice that he constructed.

"Once I find a way to bring down the Remrus Empire, I'll return immediately."

And as he stepped down from the stand, alone in the church, he began to advance forward.

♦ ♦ ♦

Some time later.

The place was on a road northeast of the Remrus Empire.

On that road, galloping towards the Remrus Empire on horses,

"Why~ the hell do we have to go and save Ryner, huh?"

Zohra Rom complained.

Brown hair, strong and competitive blue eyes.

Dressed in the vermillion combat uniform that only the elites of the **Azure Princess Mercenaries** were allowed to wear, with the emblem of a bird about to take flight on his chest.

If one saw that armed figure was on a horse, running towards another country, that country's soldiers would immediately begin chasing him; however, he didn't seem to care about the situation at all, and,

"Though the Princess is always going easy on Ryner, what do you think, stupid brat?"

He said such a thing.

And then, with an irritated expression, Zohra looked over to the idiot on the horse running parallel to his.

At his side was a man unsurprisingly like him, dressed in the uniform of the **Azure Princess Mercenaries**, on a running horse.

Peria Peruula.

Golden hair rested on his shoulders in a smooth talker's hairstyle, always seeming like he was putting on airs, and a face with closed eyes.

That face looked over at him, and said,

"Who's the stupid brat?"

"It's definitely someone here."

To that, Peria looked around with a restless face, and then,

"Ah, it's Zohra?"

"I'll kill you."

"The one who rushed forward was you, Zohra, wasn't it?

"Well, fine. More importantly, answer the question, stupid brat."

"What is it, moronic brat?"

"Asshole."

"Now, don’t immediately move to throw that knife at me. Even if that weren't so, you keep making your horse run at full force and it's getting tired, so stop pointlessly using up your energy,"

He said, and certainly, for the last two days, they'd been running their horses at full force, with the fatigue starting to wear down at them.

"Then answer my question, Peria!"

Zohra said, compromising and calling the idiot's name.

To that, Peria replied,

"You mean how Pia’s too nice to Ryner?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Well, definitely. But it's not as if I can't understand how she feels. After all, she, Ryner, and I trained together at the same place, so we’re childhood friends. You're different, Zohra. You don’t have that kind of deep bond, do you?"

"Ah? If you're talking like that, are you trying to pick a fight?"

Peria cheerfully continued,

"And so, seeing as how, with the bond between Pia and me, there's no room for you, Zohra, you should just give up already and stop trying to appeal yourself to Pia..."

Before that idiot could finish that nonsense, Zohra threw his knife.

At an incredible speed, that knife flew towards Peria’s neck.

"Like I said, stop throwing your knives right away."

However, Peria easily caught the knife.

At that, Zohra glared at Peria, and like that,

"It's because you keep spouting out crap, asshole,"

He said, to which Peria shrugged.

"It's the truth, so it can't be helped?"

"How the hell is that the truth? You're not at all close with the Princess, don't you think?"

"That's not true. Pia is always saying that she likes me."

"She tells me that too! The other day, she said something like, *'Zohra, you're cute, you know that?'*, you know!"

"Eh... ah, b-but she said that she was at peace when she was with me!"

"What!? N-No, she told me that too."

"That's a liiiiiiie."

"It's not a lie! Geez, the Princess is always consulting with me about stuff like, *'Peria is always such a nuisance, huh?'*..."

He began, but suddenly, Peria threw the knife at him with all his strength.

"Uwa—"

Zohra said, catching it. And then, while throwing the knife back,

"What the hell are you doing!?"

He shouted, as Peria caught the knife, and,

"That's my line!"

He said, throwing the knife back again.

Like that, the two of them continued to throw the knife back and forth at each other.

Again and again, they continued to throw the knife back and forth.

If it were like the usual, Pia would come and stop them, but right now, Pia wasn't here, and so the knife continued to be exchanged without limit, as it made about a hundred round trips.

"Geez, enough!"

Peria groaned, putting the knife away in his pocket.

At that, Zohra, while panting for breath,

"Oh, are you admitting defeat? So it’s my victory?"

He said, to which Peria looked his way with an astonished expression.

"....."

However, ignoring him, he said nothing.

Regarding that,

"You’re pissing me off with that."

Zohra said, but Peria then blatantly ignored him and looked the opposite direction, and,

"Weeeirdo."

He said, firing off that word, and then stopped. And he also looked the other way.

From the beginning, the two had a bad relationship. He hated that an idiot like him was always by Pia's side. *Why do I have to work with a guy like him*, Zohra continued to sulk over.

Thus, while turning his face away, he took a thin sheet of paper out of his pocket.

It was a letter delivered from Vois Fiurelle to Pia.

Zohra read that letter again.

Something like this was written.

"Iyaa, iyaa, Queen-sama, how are you doing? This is Vois Fiurelle who, because of the wild idea of being stepped on by the beautiful Pia-san, hasn't been able to concentrate.

Though this is a letter for the sake of transmitting my hot feelings towards you on this paper, before that, let’s please talk about work for a bit.

The truth is that we're have just a few problems here in the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, and so I'll be reporting them.

First:

Ryner-san has been kidnapped by the Remrus Empire~ ☆

Second:

We were visited by a gloomy, black-haired Princess-Cut-kun from the Roland Empire, and, well, though we've been working hard to keep him confined, it seems that nevertheless, the absence of the Demon King has been revealed to the world.

Third:

But because of this, we haven't sent out a rescue team for Ryner-san.

Fourth:

And so, please take care of Ryner-san.

Well, that's enough about such trivial matters, so I pray our next encounter comes soon~; though I want to say that, unfortunately I'm a bit busy with cleaning up after Princess-Cut-kun, so that was impolite of me~.

From Goddess Princess-sama's slave ♡ Vois Fiurelle"

As he read such a stupid letter, Zohra frowned.

"Whyyyy the hell are we listening to the wishes of this damn brat?"

He said, wanting to scrunch up the paper and throw it away, but since the fact that Ryner wasn't in the People's Republic of Sphelliyet was something that couldn't be leaked to the outside world, so regarding that letter that he wanted to toss,

"Ah, damn it,"

He said, unhappily putting it back in his pocket.

Then, looking over to Peria who was facing the other way,

"So, why does the Princess goes easy on Ryner like that?"

He said, as Peria looked over at him.

"What's this? Weren't we fighting?"

"Who cares?"

"Geez~. Anyway, that topic's what started it."

"Y'know, Ryner's attitude also annoys me in general. No matter how much you called him, he didn't come at all, and now that he's shown up after all that time, he's just as pathetic as he was back then, huh?"

Peria smiled wryly at that, and,

"Well, from the start, Ryner was always Timid-kun, after all."

"And now that he's been kidnapped, we have to go and save him? Haa? I just wanna say to him, *'What are you, some kinda princess!?'*!?"

At those words, Peria laughed.

"Ryner *is* like a princess."

"I already decided from the beginning that Pia is my only Princess."

"Mine as well."

"Then, that's that. Let's stop with this rescue mission? This sucks... it'll still take about another two days before we reach the Remrus Empire."

Peria smiled at that, and,

"Good idea. I've been sitting on this horse for a bit too long, so my butt's starting to hurt."

"Ah, mine too, mine too."

"Oh, this is rare. Then, are we really stopping?"

Peria said.

To that,

"Let's do it?"

Zohra said, nodding.

And so, as the two's opinion matched completely,

"....."

However, the two of them didn't stop their horses.

Instead, they continued galloping forward at an abnormal speed down the center of the road.

Furthermore, up ahead, several armed soldiers had become visible. Finally, the presences of those two were revealed to the country's security.

There was no way they wouldn't see them, as they loudly galloped ahead without any attempt to hide themselves.

Looking at those soldiers whom they were ambushing,

"... Not stopping?"

Zohra said, to which Peria smiled and spoke.

"Aren't you?"

"No, see, unlike you, it's one of my rules to never betray a comrade."

"Haha, me too."

"No, you have a traitor's face."

"Eh~, what does that kind of face look like?"

"Like yours."

"But I don't want one... ah, Zohra, by the way, there are forty enemy soldiers."

Peria suddenly said that.

They were still at a distance where it should've been impossible to identify the number of soldiers, but Peria easily said that.

But regarding that,

"Got it,"

Zohra said, believing in that.

After all, Peria was someone with the **All Enchantment** ability.

After all, he was a victim of the experiments that the previous Roland Empire carried out.

In return for losing his sight, hearing, and sense of touch, he could feel things over a wide area that others normally wouldn't be able to sense, thanks to a special magic circle engraved into his brain.

That was why he could see the number of enemy soldiers just now. He was able to sense what the the enemy soldiers were armed with.

And so, after Zohra nodded at that,

"Are they on horses?"

He asked, to which, with closed eyes, Peria said,

"They are."

"Then, let’s steal their horses and move on. This one's already exhausted."

"Sure thing."

"By the way, regardless of what happens to you, I won't be paying attention."

"Oh, but I thought it was one of your rules to never betray a comrade?"

"You’re not my comrade."

"Not truuuue..."

While saying such words, Peria laughed cheerfully.

And during that time, they’d steadily gotten closer to the enemy soldiers.

The guards spoke.

"You bastards are completely surrounded! Stop your horses and drop your weapons this instant..."

They began, but then Zohra moved faster on his horse, and,

"Shut up,"

He said, jumping towards the soldier who'd given out the warning. As he kicked his face, the guy fell off his horse.

And stealing that horse,

"Well then, I'm off~."

He said, but in front of him, Peria had stolen a different horse and was on the move.

"Ah, asshole—"

"What's thiiis? Zohra-chan's rather slow, isn't he?"

To those stupid words, Zohra threw a knife at the idiot.

Peria dodged it.

The knife then pierced the shoulder of an enemy soldier who was behind him and about to activate an offensive spell in their direction.

Peria looked at that, and then,

"Thank you for helping me."

"I wasn't helping you!"

"Again..."

"You bastard—because this isn't the place to be saying that kinda crap, let's go. We'll hurry up, quickly save that idiot, and then punch that princess-wannabe in the face!"

Zohra said, to which,

"Sounds good to me~"

Peria laughed.

And so the two cut through the forty enemy soldiers and once again started running towards the Remrus Empire.

♦ ♦ ♦

And the time returns to the beginning.

It was a place with an ominous feeling.

No, the landscape itself wasn't unusual, being a plain—however.

"....."

Sion had become wary of how far he'd advanced forward.

It looked like the colour of the sky was gradually being coated in a different shade.

He'd advanced forward enough.

Enough time had passed, the colour of the world being coated in a different shade, with a restless feeling arising in his cest.

And what that feeling was, he personally didn't know.

But, because he didn't know, he was that much more anxious.

Regarding that,

"... What is this?"

Sion muttered.

"What in the world is happening?"

He muttered.

Right now, the place he was in was a plain, where Claugh Klom's forces, surrounding the rear of the Remrus Empire's main forces, should've commenced launching a surprise attack.

There, Sion was leading the soldiers.

As what had been reported, there were no traces of a fight there.

There was no blood or the scent of death whatsoever.

In spite of that, having advanced forward enough that his spirit was sinking, Sion had fallen to that sort of mood.

Then,

"Your Majesty,"

A voice rang out.

Sion looked down from on top of his horse. There, a subordinate was speaking to him.

"Field Marshal Claugh Klom—"

Sion nodded at that and spoke.

"He wants to meet with me?"

"Yes."

"Let him through."

"Understood."

Saying that, the subordinate stepped back.

From somewhat behind, pushing his way through the soldiers guarding Sion, a single man atop a horse appeared.

Bright red hair as if it were burning, a body forged like steel.

Claugh Klom.

That Claugh looked his way with a somewhat cheerful smile, and,

"Yo, Sion. Though it seems like the fight here was pretty bad, you survived?"

He said, to which Sion smiled ruefully.

"If you take that kind of tone with me, you're setting a bad example to your subordinates, you realize?"

"Then, should I call you Your Almighty Majesty?"

"That's enough, now,"

Sion said, waving his hand as he laughed.

Claugh laughed as well, approaching him on his horse. Aligning himself with Sion's, they proceeded forward.

Sion asked Claugh,

"So, the enemy's main forces surrendered without a fight?"

As he asked that, Claugh shrugged and said,

"Yeah."

He nodded, and then,

"Speaking of which, there's something I kinda want you to see, so stop the soldiers,"

He said, raising his hand, and then lowering it.

Responding to that, his subordinates ordered the soldiers to stop.

After affirming that, Claugh looked at Sion, and,

"Follow me for a bit,"

He said, to which Sion tilted his head.

"Where do you plan on going?"

"If you come with me, you'll know."

"Just you and me?"

To that, Claugh held out his hand, and,

"If you're worried about an attack from the enemy, relax. I'll protect you,"

He said such a thing.

However, of course, Sion wasn't worried about that. After all, Lucile would be following him.

That was why, right now in this place, the one whose safety was the most guaranteed was Sion.

Of course, though, it was a different story if Remrus himself or the **Goddesses** showed up.

Sion looked at the hand that Claugh was extending. Then, lifting his face, he looked at Claugh's.

"What is it that you want to show me?"

He asked.

To that, Claugh replied,

"An enemy soldier."

"An enemy soldier?"

"Yeah. One of Remrus's guys who put up no fight whatsoever."

Saying that,

"Well, just hurry up and follow me,"

He said, as he began to move his horse without waiting for Sion.

At that, quietly,

"... Lucile,"

Sion murmured.

By his ear, Lucile's voice sounded.

"I'm here."

"Claugh..."

However, with just that alone, Lucile seemed to understand what Sion was trying to say.

"It doesn't appear that he's being manipulated by the enemy. It'll likely be fine. Even if anything happens..."

"You'll protect me?"

In response, cheerfully,

"I can't make any promises,"

Lucile said such a thing.

"How unreliable,"

Sion said, smiling.

Then, he began to move his horse.

As expected, he'd advanced forward enough that his mood was sinking further.

As they moved further into the Remrus Empire's grounds, it seemed that that feeling only grew larger.

Staring at the northern sky,

"Honestly, what's with this country?"

While saying that, he caught up with Claugh. Then, looking towards where Claugh was headed—an area slightly elevated above the plain—he asked,

"Then, we're going up there?"

"Yup."

"What can you see from there?"

To that, Claugh spoke.

"Explaining would be kinda troublesome. So you should just see for yourself. Up there, Miller-senpai and Bayuuz are waiting."

"Bayuuz and Miller?"

However, Claugh didn't answer the question, as he began galloping forward.

"Now, let's go,"

He said.

In response, Sion also ordered his horse to begin galloping, as he moved forward.

Up on higher ground, towards a place where it was as if they were overlooking the plain, he moved.

As Claugh had said, Rahel Miller and Bayuuz White were there.

Both wer equal to Field Marshals within the Roland Empire's military.

Furthermore, up there, as if overseeing something, hundreds of soldiers had set up camp.

Sion looked towards that encampment.

Miller and co. noticed them approaching.

In response, Sion raised his hand. He was about to speak up.

However,

"....."

His voice didn't come out.

Because, on the way, he saw.

Atop that area, on the way to where Miller and co. were, he saw.

To the side of Miller and the others.

In a plain up there, donned in the combat uniform of the Remrus Empire, was a group of soldiers.

Tens of thousands of soldiers.

Each and every one of those soldiers displayed the same appearance.

They were all kneeling prostrate on the ground. Furthermore, their backs looked as if they'd been torn apart from the inside, and from that crack, violent branch-like objects grew.

Seven branches.

"....."

No, rather, they didn't look quite like branches.

They were arms.

Thin arms were growing.

And those seven arms were joining hands with the other arms that grew from the backs of the surrounding soldiers.

Arms grown from the backs of tens and hundreds of thousands of soldiers were mutually joined together by their hands.

Regarding that abnormal sight, without thinking,

"... What is this?"

He leaked out such foolish words.

Even though there wasn't anyone who would have an answer to that.

Even though there wasn't anyone who would've seen this sort of thing before.

However, Miller responded to that. He looked up at Sion, and then looking down at the Remrus Empire soldiers,

"... They became like this one hour ago. Until then, they'd been nothing but ordinary humans,"

He explained.

In other words, during the time it took for Sion to come here, it seemed that the Remrus Empire's soldiers had become like this.

Staring at that, Sion asked,

"Are they alive?"

To that question, it was Bayuuz's turn to respond.

"We're unable to approach them, and so haven't investigated."

"Unable to approach them?"

"Yes. The Roland soldiers who approached them ended up the same way..."

"Wha—? Then, over there, those are also Roland soldiers..."

"Thousands of them fell to it."

"....."

"The reason we called Your Majesty here alone was because of how shocking this sight is. If this were to be seen by the soldiers..."

He began, but then Sion interrupted Bayuuz with a wave of his hand.

"I understand your reasons for calling me here alone. How do you all intend to deal with this?"

Miller answered that.

"With **Rhule Fragmei**..."

"Even though you don't know what their situation is, you'll kill them?"

"If there was another option, then I would be willing to choose that instead. However, what other ideas are there? Merely approaching them will affect you. Furthermore, it's likely that that figure has some sort of significance, isn't it? From here on, though we don't know how they might change, we can't afford to leave them be. More importantly, in order to enter the Remrus Empire, we must cross this plain..."

He said.

At that, again, Sion gazed at the Remrus Empire's soldiers.

He gazed at the humans who lay prostrate on the ground, with arms growing from their backs.

And,

"Just what is Remrus trying to do..."

Then, there was a voice from behind him.

Slightly below the elevated area,

"Your Majesty!"

The voice of a subordinate called out for him, as they moved towards the area.

In response, Sion spoke.

"Don't leave this area. To the soldiers who still haven't seen this..."

He began, but at that, Miller said,

"I know. I've already given the orders to my subordinates."

As those words were spoken, Sion's subordinate, on the way to the elevated area, was stopped.

In their place, Miller's subordinate relayed the message.

"Your Majesty, it seems that below, someone has come seeking an

audience with you,"

They said such a thing.

At that, Sion asked,

"An envoy from the Remrus Empire?"

However, Miller's subordinate shook their head, and replied,

"That's not it."

"Then who?"

"They refuse to reveal their affiliation. They said that if they gave their names instead, His Majesty would know."

"Their names? Who are they?"

At that,

"The ones who have come are two women approximately the age of twenty. They introduced themselves as Ferris Eris and Kiefer Knolles,"

The subordinate said that.

Furthermore,

"According to them, Ryner has been captured by the Remrus Empire, and so they've come to seek help—that was what they wanted to tell His Majesty..."

They began, but by that point, Sion was no longer listening.

The ones who'd come were Ferris and Kiefer.

And,

"... Ryner... He's been captured by Remrus?"

The moment he heard that, shock hit him as if his heart had been crushed.

Ryner has—

He's fallen into Remrus's hands?

Sion scowled at that. And turning around, he looked up.

At the northern sky.

At the land where countless humans were prostrate on the ground, with arms growing from their backs.

It all seemed so disgraceful.

It all seemed as if that what had kept the world together up until now had been broken.

And finally, he saw their true colours.

He saw what Remrus was trying to do.

Right now, Ryner was in the Remrus Empire, and Remrus—

"... He intends to devour Ryner?"

He said, scowling.

Then, again, he turned around.

And to Miller,

"Use the **Rhule Fragmei** already. Continue to wipe out the Remrus Empire soldiers and march forward,"

He ordered.

Miller nodded at that and began to move.

But Sion didn't stop. Below where he was standing—to where the Remrus Empire soldiers were, he began to descend.

However, then,

"Your Majesty, what shall we do about the ones who wish to meet with you?"

Miller's subordinate asked such a thing.

In response, he looked over his shoulder. He looked towards the soldiers that he was leading, in an location a short distance away.

Over there, Ferris and Kiefer had apparently come.

At that, remaining silent for a short while as if pondering over it,

"Bring them to me. We'll take them with us to the Remrus Empire,"

He ordered.

♦ ♦ ♦

The location again moves further up north.

The capital of the Remrus Empire—Echran.

There were no longer any humans remaining in that town.

Even though Echran should have the largest metropolis in the central continent, crowded with millions of people, there were no longer any humans remaining.

Right now, what remained was—

"....."

The **Goddess of Reincarnation** [Milk Ephillet] gazed at that town.

A flaxen ponytail, and large, round eyes.

Gazing at the sight before her with those eyes,

"... Ah, it's like that. Remrus... You've chosen like so, then..."

She murmured.

Before her, the **Humans** were, one by one, converting with magic.

The structure inside of them being rewritten, collapsed on the ground, and torn from their backs, violet arms grew.

And those arms linked with their neighbouring **Humans'** ones.

Moreover, because of that, gradually, gradually, a large procedure spread.

In this country of the Remrus Empire, using the magic power from

within all the **Humans**' bodies, a gigantic procedure was spreading.

At that,

"Just what is this..."

From behind her, her subordinate by the name of Lear Rinkal said.

However, controlling that,

"Don't move away from me, Lear,"

Milk said.

In response, Lear nodded, and,

"Don't worry. I'll protect you, Captain,"

He said, to which Milk felt like laughing.

No, it wasn't because, in this situation, Lear wouldn't be able to protect her and so his words were foolish.

Rather, as she'd become aware of a strange feeling within her, she felt like laughing.

Specifically, right now, she felt as if she had to protect her subordinates.

Even though they were worthless **Humans** not worth caring over, the human character of Milk within her felt that it was necessary to protect her subordinates.

And that feeling took over her, who should be a **Goddess**.

"... Aha,"

She laughed.

Feeling that the **Human** part within her was steadily, steadily growing, she became cheerful.

But over there, Remrus's spell was progressing further.

The collapsed **Humans** were converting with magic.

The collapsed **Humans** were converting with magic.

And furthermore, already one subordinate, Moe Velariore, was standing before her, and,

"Captain, please step back,"

He said such a thing.

On top of that, Lach Velariore held Milk from behind and spoke.

"What should we do about this, Lear?"

Lear, who always had a calm expression on his face, looked oddly troubled, and,

"All we can do is retreat."

"But to where?"

Moe said.

And that question was justified.

There was no longer anywhere they could escape to.

At least, within the territory of the Remrus Empire, there wasn't anywhere.

It seemed that Remrus had laid a curse over the entire country.

"... This has become rather troublesome,"

Milk thought.

It was likely that a considerable amount of time had passed as the large-scale spell was being developed.

This was the world where **Humans** lived.

The place where the **Hero** and **Goddesses** dwelled was in a slightly different dimension.

There, for **Goddesses** to wield their power, there was compensation to be had.

Despite that, Remrus was trying to use a large amount of power.

He was trying to use an impossibly large amount of power.

If he used this kind of power.

If he used this kind of ignored power against the framework of this sort of world,

"... His existence would disappear... though a powerless **Crawling God** like him shouldn't be able to use this kind of power... Nevertheless, it seems that on your own, you've discovered a solution, hmm?"

She murmured.

During that time,

"Run away!"

Her subordinates cried out as they ran.

It was as if she, who had a small build, was being kidnapped as she was carried away by Lach.

While avoiding the **Humans** who had arms growing from their backs, they advanced through the town.

However, like that, she blankly looked up at the sky.

The sky was clear.

A cloudless, blue sky—a sky that ordinary **Humans** would see.

But its colour was faintly changing.

From blue to blue.[1]

From blue to blue.

It seemed that Remrus was dyeing this world's framework, structure, arrangement.

He was wagering his own life.

Holding up his own existence, Remrus was desperately struggling.

For the sake of opening a hole in this closed world.

For the sake of advancing forward in this world that never would.

And narrowing her eyes at that,

"... Everyone, don't go that way. Head towards the church in the center of the town,"

She said.

At that, Lear and the others halted. And looking at her,

"However, the center of the town..."

"Just do as I say. That's the only place where we'll find a way of stopping this,"

Milk said.

Then again she looked up at the sky.

Its colour was changing, moment by moment.

With what method Remrus was moving with, she didn't know.

Though she didn't know,

"... I'll find out. What it is that you're trying to do, and how you're trying to change this world,"

As she said that, Milk's team headed towards the church in the center of the town.

♦ ♦ ♦

And in that church, in the center of the town.

In the jail constructed underground, Calne Kaiwel was being held captive.

Loose blond hair, charming blue eyes. On his thin body, he wore the combat uniform of a Roland Empire officer; however, that uniform had become a mess.

Brushing his clothes in the arms and stomach areas,

"Ah~, I'm starving,"

He said.

Casually getting up, he looked around.

That said, there wasn't much to learn from the narrow cell.

Then, standing up, he looked towards the iron door that was the only entrance/exit to the prison.

And to that door,

"Um~, could you come here for a bit~?"

He said such a thing.

Furthermore,

"The truth is, I haven't eaten since the day before yesterday—?"

He said, raising his voice, but,

"....."

From the other side of the door, there was no response.

"Hmm. Well, that didn't work,"

He said, crossing his arms.

Like that, he sat back down again on the sorry excuse for a cloth. And,

"... Maybe they've decided to starve me to death?"

He muttered while again examining the prison. He strained to find a place where he could escape.

Although he tried, in the time that he'd spent captured, he'd already schemed five prison breaks, and each time was a failure.

"... By this point, there's no way that I'd find a way to escape, huh?"

He muttered in a troubled manner.

Then, pushing down on his stomach that growled in hunger, he smiled faintly.

When he heard about the disappointing me who got captured so easily,

Claugh-san probably asked,

"What the hell is that idiot doing at such an important time?"

Something like that, huh?—as he imagined things like that, he laughed frivolously.

Then, furthermore, a mental image of Eslina arose. Her pretty amber hair, and blue eyes that possessed an air of dignity.

Picturing that,

"... Eslina must be worried, isn't she?"

He muttered, flopping over onto his side.

All he could see was the jet black ceiling.

With no windows, this place was shrouded in darkness.

Furthermore, since the evening of the day before yesterday, he hadn't sensed any sounds or signs of human presence.

His nerves dull after having gone so long without eating or drinking, he listened to the sound of his breathing and heartbeat, but only those.

There was nothing else.

It wasn't that he especially hated the isolation, as he'd also received training in dealing with that, but,

"... So I'm really going to die here, aren't I?"

He said to himself.

"I ne~ver thought that I'd die before Claugh-senpai who charges recklessly into fights,"

He said such things to himself, laughing.

Of course, no one replied.

However, again the mental image of a girl arose. A girl with the sagacious, bright face like Fiole's.

Always following after him, going *Calne-san, Calne-san*, the smiling,

cute face of a girl arose in his mind.

"....."

He smiled.

Remembering her smiling face, he smiled happily.

And,

"... Ah~, just as I thought,"

He said.

"Just as I thought, it was a good idea not to return Eslina's feelings,"

He said, smiling.

"Like I thought, someone like me isn't suited to be with Eslina. After all, a ladykiller who can't even fend for himself will just end up leaving. Not to mention a pervert who likes older women."

While saying such things, he smiled frivolously.

"That's why Eslina should find someone else—nice, diligent guy. Build a family with a guy like that. Not with some idiot who gets captured and left to die in a prison,"

He said, as if he were conversing with someone.

"... If Eslina could just forget about me and meet a guy like that... that'd be good,"

He said, conversing sincerely.

But, unsurprisingly, no one responded to that.

There was no noise around him.

It was eerie.

"....."

He'd likely die in a matter of days.

He'd been provided with no food or water since the day before yesterday. Without water, he wouldn't live for long.

And if it continued like that,

"... Ah~, yeah. When I die, Fiole will praise me for sure, right? He'll thank me for doing a good job of keeping my hands off of his little sister."

Saying that, he laughed.

After laughing, he let out a light sigh.

"....."

Again, it was silent.

All he could hear was just his heartbeat and breathing.

Just his heartbeat and breathing.

And speaking of anything else,

"....."

It was pure solitude.

Though he was about to continue that line of thought, he stopped.

Because there was no point in thinking about it.

Because if he thought about it, then he'd become afraid and start talking about disgraceful, foolish things like how he didn't want to die here, or how he wanted to see Eslina again.

"....."

That was why, without thinking about anything, he closed his eyes.

Like that, he was about to submerge his consciousness into darkness —

All of a sudden.

Though it was echoed from far away, he heard a sound.

It was from beyond the iron door.

A sound rang out from outside the prison.

Furthermore, that sound was getting closer.

Steadily thumping, it was getting closer.

At that,

"This sound is—"

Calne jumped to his feet.

Then he started gathering all of his strength. Though, as he hadn't been eating or drinking properly in this place, he couldn't muster up much strength in his body,

"... Sooooner or later, I have to succeed in a jailbreak, or else it's going to be bad for me, huh?"

He muttered.

Though he didn't know who it was that coming here right now, it was likely the one in charge of giving him his meals. In that case, first, he should grab the server's arm or something like that.

At the bottom-most part of the iron door, there was a small, iron door where the food would come from, which Calne stared at.

The meal always came from there.

Of course, the other party knew that he would likely be plotting a jailbreak, so they never put their hand through.

On the contrary, they were careful and placed the meal on a tray and pushed it through to the other side with a stick.

However, regarding that, Calne slowly began moving his finger. With his fingertip, he was drawing a magic circle of light in the air.

What he was drawing was Roland's magic.

Called **Bakushu**, it was a spell to create a rope of light. That thread would expand and contract according to the user's orders, and was able to capture a target—however, the spell wasn't used often in Roland.

First of all, it was abnormally difficult to control the thread's movements, and so the thread wouldn't move towards the targeted place.

Even if it were a considerably skilled mage, they would have

difficulty hitting the mark, and so it was a spell that wasn't used often, but,

"If this doesn't work, I'm going to cry,"

While saying such things, he completed his spell.

And quietly, he muttered,

"WHAT I SEEK IS THE LIGHT FIELD > > > BAKUSHU,"

He said, completing the incantation.

A lump of light formed at the center of the magic circle, and then, a thread—or rather, a line with a thickness closer to that of a rope could now be extended.

And he waited.

He waited for the server to come.

Just as predicted, the sound stopped in front of Calne's cell.

"... They've come,"

He thought.

He concentrated.

And inside his head, again and again, the image repeated itself.

—The moment the door that his food came from opened, once he confirmed that, he'd launch the rope. And he'd capture the server's body.

He'd launch the rope and capture the server.

He'd launch the rope and capture the server.

Again and again, he repeated that inside his head.

He heard the sound of the outside door being touched.

Reacting to that, Calne crouched down.

He waited for the meal door to open—

"....."

But then, something outside of his predictions occurred.

The door.

The door before him opened.

Not the small door used for meals, but the prison door.

At that,

"No way,"

Calne groaned.

In that case, what he should do had changed. If it were this door opening, what he should do had changed.

If the one entering was the jailer, someone meant to transfer him, the executor, or possibly a torturer—he wasn't sure—then he'd have to struggle against them and escape.

Despite that, at the moment, he'd prepared a spell meant to capture the enemy.

"Ah, geez, well, it's fine. At any rate, I can use this spell to cause confusion, and then..."

He began, but then his words stopped.

Because standing outside the door, for some reason, was an acquaintance of his.

Because standing outside the door was a single man whose face he recognized.

At that,

"Eh?"

Calne let his voice slip without thinking.

Then, staring at that man's face fixedly,

"Um, why are you here?"

He said.

Standing there was a black-haired man.

Black hair like he'd just gotten out of bed, languid eyes.

A tall, lean figure with a bent back.

Looking at that man,

"Aren't you Ryner Lute-san?"

Calne asked, to which Ryner looked his way, and,

"... Calne? It's a problem for you to be confined here, huh? You can leave already."

"E-Eh? What? The one confining me..."

He began, but ignoring that, Ryner turned on his heel. He turned his back to Calne.

And he exited the prison.

Following him, Calne also exited the prison. And moving through the basement, at Ryner's back,

"What in the world are you doing here?"

He asked, to which Ryner looked over his shoulder.

And with a sad smile,

"....."

He didn't answer the question, however.

Instead, staring at him,

"... Go back, and deliver this message to Sion. I want to talk with him for a bit. I'll be waiting here, so..."

Staring at him with sad eyes,

"Tell him that,"

He said.

1. Jump up ↑ "Blue (*ao*)" here is continuously written using different kanji, likely to indicate that the colour change isn't something that'd be noticed normally.

Back to Volume 7 Return to Main Page Forward to Volume 9